













# THE HILL OF TRIUMPH

A Story of Jerusalem in the  
Time of Christ

BY  
REV. LEO MURPHY



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Scarlett Riley  
Naomi Ruth

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## CHAPTER I

### THE JOURNEY

THE sombre blackness of the Eastern night hung like a pall over Jerusalem, the City of David—a blackness relieved only by the faint gleaming of the stars high up in the heavens, and the pale radiance of the thin crescent of the Paschal moon, riding serenely above.

It was near the midnight hour, and silence, majestic and awful, rested upon the land hushed now from the bustle of life's activities.

In the death-like stillness of this midnight hour one could hardly realize that within those walls now dark and towering in the gloom of night,—those walls encompassing Jerusalem—nearly a million human beings dwelt and worked and lived. Jerusalem, the mighty metropolis of Judea, the Holy City of the nation, the city of God! Jerusalem the busy, roaring mart of Oriental commerce, wherein the cries of the merchants and tradesmen mingled strangely at the noonday hour with the prayers and invocations of the Chosen People!

Yet at this hour all was still; for Jerusalem was wrapped in slumber; and sleep, God's blessed boon to man, had quieted the city's life, and brought to her

inhabitants, a temporary respite from the cares which tore them.

This night of which we write, has now passed some nineteen hundred years, but it was one which like many another of that time marked the happening of events, which the course of time can never efface from the memory of man. For on that night, long ago, whilst Pontius Pilate and the Roman garrison slept soundly in their fortress of Antonia beneath the ramparts of the Holy City, and Herod, Judea's King, lay in a troubled slumber within his castle walls, there dwelt nearby, unknown, uncrowned, unhonored, another King. King of Rome? King of Judea? Aye, and King of Earth and Heaven was He—Jesus Christ, the youthful Rabbi of the Chosen People, who but that day had shown Himself to be the King of life and death, when in the presence of the multitudes gathered about Him, He had recalled from death, one who for three days had lain in the grave—Lazarus, the Councillor of Bethany, hard by the Holy City. And in the death-like silence of this epochal night, Jesus, the Unknown King slept—even as did Caesar at Rome, and Pilate and Herod in Jerusalem, but His sleep was sweet, untroubled and holy.

His bed was not the regal couch of kingly castle. His chamber not the guarded suite of royalty's right. Rather it was the couch of the guest chamber in the home of a friend—Lazarus, whom He had resuscitated in a house situated in a little suburb itself without the walls of the royal city. For it was fitting that the Christ should sleep outside this kingly city, until the day, not far removed when He would declare unto His nation and the world, the kingship which was His by right divine, and until that city, bowing before Him, should with loud acclaim greet Him with that title

which was His from on high—the Son of David, the Son of God, the King of Heaven and of earth.

It was near the beginning of the month of Nizan, which in our calendar corresponds with April, and the weather, though in the heat of the noonday sun, bright, and warm, and cheerful, was now in the stillly midnight, sharp and piercing. A gentle breeze was blowing, crooning softly through the tree-tops as though it were the breathing of the city's million sleepers blended into one hushed voice, murmuring in sleep, even as when awake, the Lamentations of Jeremiah over the desolation of their beloved city.

On the broad highway leading southeastwards from the Holy City, beyond its walls, towards the Mount of Evil Council, two shrouded figures made their way hastily and in silence. In the darkness of the hour one could scarcely distinguish the garb of the travellers, nor tell what be their state in life or their nationality for even as their garments protected them from the piercing night winds, so too the blackness about them shielded them from the curious scrutiny of the chance passerby, if such they should meet upon their way at this unusual hour.

Thus they walked on and on, ever southeastwards for nearly half an hour, the only sounds their own footfalls upon the smooth highway, the whispering of the trees beside their path, or now and again, faintly, as if they came from another world, the barking of a dog, the lowing of the cattle far away upon the hillsides, where shepherds kept the nocturnal watches, or the shrill cawing of a bird high up above, as he called to his mate through the darkness.

They looked neither to right or left, nor were they conscious of the weird beauty of the scene upon which their backs were so steadily turned—the silent death-

like city with its countless palaces of wealth and magnificence and its glorious Temple containing the blessed shrine of the Holy of Holies, wherein, even at this very hour the seven lamps burned in perpetual homage to Jehovah, their God. Nor did they give a thought to this wondrous miracle of sleep which thus could silence man and beast and make nature herself as though she were dead. No, they thought not at all of these things, for their minds were occupied rather with the journey they had undertaken, and which they were now pursuing; and much they pondered on the great events transpiring even in their very midst and in the face of which a nation stood astounded and aghast—the lame made to walk, the crippled and maimed made straight, the blind to see, the dumb to talk,—these and many other wonders done by the man called Jesus. But last of all and greatest by far, a dead man brought to life again.

"What thinkest thou, Nicodemus, can be the meaning of this sudden summons?"

The taller of the two had broken the silence by his query.

"I cannot imagine the reason, Joseph, my friend," replied his companion.

As their conversation revealed, they had been hurriedly summoned during the night to attend a meeting. It was to take place at a rendezvous, designated in the information supplied by the messenger who had come to them; and, strangely enough, this was outside the city walls, in a suburb of Jerusalem, now known to history and Christian tradition as the Mount of Evil Council. The meeting itself was that of the Sanhedrin, or Supreme Council of the Jewish people. The men had set out on foot from their homes in the Capital, deeming it wiser to walk, than to make use of

chariots for fear that they might arouse suspicions at this hour, since the envoy who had been sent to them had expressly warned them that the meeting was to be of a most secret nature.

We have said that their station and their rank were hidden by the sombre gloom but these few words they spoke sufficed to mark them as the cultured men they were—Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, councillors of the Jewish nation.

"But can it be" continued Joseph, "that the Sanhedrin proposeth some new law unto the people, or would speak unto them some new pronouncement of Jehovah, our Lord?"

"Nay I think not" said the other. "For already the Passover is but three weeks off, and many of our people have even now betaken themselves unto our city in preparation therefor. Not at this time would our High Priest offer new legislation. And even though he did, why should he convoke our assembly at this unusual hour and on the Mount of Evil Council, rather than within the city walls as is his wont? Strange methods these my friend, nor do I rightly comprehend their meaning."

"Nor I, my friend Nicodemus. Methinks 'tis something of great import, which would thus compel the leaders of the Council to resort unto these practices which are so strange and stealthy. Maybe some plot against the Romans hath been betrayed which threateneth the people's safety."

"Aye, but with thee and me these things are but conjecture. Soon we shall know the reason from the lips of the President of the Sanhedrin himself for we are nearing the Mountain."

On and on again they trudged in silence, always up the incline leading towards their destination. Jerusa-

lem was now behind them spreading far out on the hills and valleys comprising the city of David, and it seemed as though these two figures creeping stealthily in the night were the last remaining sentinels of a city of the dead.

Once again the voice of Joseph pierced the stilly darkness, and he cast a furtive glance at his companion as he spoke—the action of one who fears the effect his words may have.

"Nicodemus, I have thought much of Jesus this night."

His tone was clear and tense.

"Ah, Jesus, the Master," said the other, and his voice seemed to cling caressingly to the sweet name of the Messiah as he pronounced it.

"I was in Bethany today. I was at the tomb when He brought our friend Lazarus back to life. I was near Him all the while, and I watched Him with awe and fear and reverence. His face, His voice, His look, His words, His very presence, His doctrine, His miracles; and this one just today, bringing back to life a man dead three days! Ah! Nicodemus, I have oftentimes asked myself who is He; and there cometh to me always the answer that He is a prophet sent by God. I am a councillor, a member of the Sanhedrin, the high Council of our nation, and I know it is not right that I should permit such unholy thoughts to come into my spirit, or that I should exalt a humble carpenter and make of Him, even in my fancy, a prophet from on high. But my soul is sorely troubled with all I have seen and heard, for He speaketh the words and doth the works of God Himself."

"Let not thy spirit be troubled" softly spoke the other. "I too think much and often of the Christ."

Joseph stopped, gazing with incredulity upon his friend.

"Thou thinkest too of Him!" he exclaimed.

Nicodemus smiled, and laid his hands upon his companion's arm as they resumed their former pace.

"Aye, my friend," he said, "and more than that, I have oft-times heard Him preach; and even once, I went to Him in secret and spoke with Him."

"Spoke with Him, thou sayest! Then tell me of Him and His words," cried Joseph, and excitement, eagerness and emotion betrayed themselves in his face and in his voice.

For a moment Nicodemus did not answer. Was it that he hesitated to trust Joseph with his secret; or rather was it that he held the memory of his conversation with Jesus so sacred, that he feared that its very telling might be a profanation; or, yet again, was it not perhaps, that the very mention of the Master's name, the very recalling of that conversation with Him in the past, filled the councillor's soul with such sweet and happy memories, that for the moment they transported him beyond the realms of realism, and filled him with unearthly bliss? Be what it may, Nicodemus walked on in silence for some moments seemingly oblivious of Joseph beside him, whilst in the blackness of the night, the latter stared sharply at his fellow traveller, a great fear gripping his heart lest he should not hear from his friend, the tidings of Jesus, for which his soul was longing.

At length the voice of Nicodemus floated softly on the midnight breeze.

"Aye, my friend, once I spoke with Jesus, and His all-holy words still linger in my memory."

The councillor spoke as one in reverie, as if fearing that even in the speaking he might dispel a wonderful

vision or make to vanish the ethereal structure of a dream.

"Ah! happy man, Nicodemus. I would that I had spoken with Him," said Joseph.

The other paid no heed to his companion's words, but slackened his pace; and in that far-off voice, spoke again as though he dwelt in a world apart.

"I, too, am a ruler of the people, even as thou, Joseph. I, too am a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin of our nation. Little then would it become me, were I to mingle amongst the people standing about the Master, Jesus; ill would it befit my rank and station were I to listen to His teaching as though He were the Master and I the pupil, much less that I should speak in public with Him, who in the eyes of the populace hath profaned the Sabbath, and broken our country's laws."

"I understand full well" replied Joseph. "Thou art a Pharisee, as I; nor doth it behoove us to arouse the ire of our colleagues by any unseemly conduct, nor yet again to lower in the people's eyes respect for the high office which is ours by right divine."

"And yet" went on the councillor Nicodemus, "much had I heard of Him, and of His marvellous words and deeds, and secretly within my soul I yearned to hear Him. And thus, aroused at first by idle curiosity, I betook myself unto the porches of the Temple and the houses near which He spoke; or under some pretext of state affairs, I mingled in the crowds gathered to hear Him speak, and thus I heard Him oft-times preach, until the idle curiosity of my spirit turned into a yearning for the truths He uttered."

A moment the speaker paused and his companion made no motion but waited until the story was resumed.

"And then one night, as He was staying with a friend in a dwelling, lonely and apart from the others, and when there was no great fear of detection of my action I went to Him by stealth to assuage the longing of my soul, thinking that perhaps I might become His follower, even though it be in secret."

"And didst thou confide unto Him the yearnings of thy spirit?"

"Aye, and I shall ne'er forget that first close glimpse I had of Him who calleth Himself the Son of Man. I am now gray with age, and in the passing of the years many men have I encountered, men of every nation, renowned for greatness, valor and erudition. My eyes have looked upon the noble figures of patrician lords in Rome's proud capital. I have seen the handsome scions of Judea's oldest families, and felt a tinge of honest pride as I gazed upon the finely molded features, the noble heads, the princely mien of the fairest of our nation."

The old man's voice faded faintly into the night and all was silent save for the swish of the travellers' garments about them as they trudged along.

Joseph gazed a moment in the direction of his companion and then as though fearful lest he should destroy the sacredness of the soul's communing of his friend, he held his peace.

A moment longer Nicodemus paused; then his voice was heard again softly in the shadows and at its sound Joseph drew nearer, jealous lest one small word should escape his ears.

"But as I stood alone that night with Jesus, and looked upon His figure and His countenance, then did I realize that in His presence the beauty and the bearing of these others I had seen were but shadows of a real beauty they themselves could ne'er possess even

though they might in some small way reflect it. Something in the face of Christ marked Him as one divine whose power came from Heaven. And as I stood there in His presence I was transfixed nor could I for the moment break the spell which held me. It seemed as though some spark of His Divinity had come forth from His soul and passing into mine had stifled human nature in me, and made me not a man but god-like even as the Christ Himself."

Out of the night the voice of Joseph broke in upon the speaker.

"I would that I might go to the Master and tell Him of my admiration; but, fearful lest my actions bring discredit on me, I hold myself aloof though my soul within me doth bid me believe the words He speaketh."

A sigh passed from the lips of the man as he uttered these words—the sigh of one who would follow truth and right but who fears the outcome of his action. The sigh of one, who loving virtue, suffers earthly ties to strangle the pinings of the soul for God.

If Nicodemus heard the words he paid no heed, but in that same hushed voice continued.

"And, O my friend, Joseph, as I looked upon the youthful figure of the Rabbi, spell-bound as I was with awe, behold a sound sweet with the musical melody of a heavenly harp filled the room—for Jesus had spoken! What a voice! What dulcet tones! Can Heaven's music be more lovely? and ever since that fateful night there sing within my soul celestial tones of unearthly sweetness."

"What said He to thee, Nicodemus?"

"'My son' He said, 'what wouldest thou?' And as He spoke the words, He laid His hand upon my shoulder tenderly as if He fain would calm my fears and draw me to Him."

"He laid His hands upon thee!"

"Aye, and in answer to His question I said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher from God, for no man can do these things which Thou dost unless God be with Him.' But as I uttered these words, Joseph, how harsh and piercing sounded my voice beside the voice of Jesus."

"What answer did He make unto thee?"

"'Amen, I say unto thee unless a man be born again He cannot see the Kingdom of God.'"

"Strange answer, this, He made to thee, my friend, nor do I comprehend its meaning," came the voice of Joseph in wonder.

"Nor did I, Joseph, but taking courage at the loving-kindness of the Man, I said to Him, 'Master how can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born again?' And Jesus answered in His kindly way. 'Son, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.'"

"The Kingdom of God," softly murmured the other. "Ah, would that Jesus might lead me unto it."

"Speaking thus to me of heavenly truths," continued Nicodemus, "Jesus held me near Him, so that when at length the time for my departure had arrived I was loathe to leave Him. He came with me to the portal of the house wherein our conversation had been held, and taking both my hands in His said unto me as we parted: 'Son, heed the voice of God which calleth unto thee. Come follow me.' All the convictions of my being bade me leave all things and follow Him; but, side by side with this resolve, there rose before me all that I must sacrifice in doing so, my friends, my home, and earthly station——"

The old man broke off speaking and it seemed to

Joseph that he heard a sob in his companion's voice as, softer still and in faltering tones, the latter resumed the thread of the narrative.

"I could not find within me courage and strength to make the choice. I turned without a word and left Him and went forth into the night alone. Once I turned about and looked at Him. He was standing where I had parted from Him at the portal of the house. The silvery moonlight streaming down from Heaven lighted His face and form, and made Him truly god-like. With heavy heart I turned away again, and went upon my way, knowing within myself that I had been a coward. O Joseph, Joseph, much I have suffered since that night, and always I am sad and unhappy."

He laid his hand upon his fellow-traveller's arm.

"I have told to thee, my friend, what I would not confide to other mortal ears—that down deep within my soul I believe in Jesus Christ, even though I lack the courage to espouse His teachings openly."

Instinctively the two councillors halted, and in the silence of the hour, Joseph turning to his friend, addressed these words.

"Nicodemus,—my friend since boyhood days,—to none couldst thou have given thy confidence who could better understand or appreciate it than to me. For I, too, have heard the Christ; and I believe in Him even as thou; though, like thee, I lack the courage to call Him openly 'Master.'"

Without a word further, these two shrouded figures embraced there on the broad highway, with the sleeping city behind them—two figures alone in the night, two life-long friends now drawn closer to each other by a youthful Carpenter, who at that very moment slumbered peacefully in Bethany. And as they em-

braced, from each there went forth to Jehovah a silent prayer.

"Father in Heaven, grant that one day we may publicly acclaim Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God."

They were now near their destination on the Mount; and they hastened their steps, their cloaks drawn closely about them, each deeply wrapped in thought—thought of this nocturnal meeting, which they must attend, but deeper and more pressing still—thoughts of Jesus.

Each now knew the other's secret; each believed in the Master, and each felt happy that he had revealed his belief, for in the sharing of their burden with another, they felt as all must feel, more happiness and more content. But both these Councillors of the Chosen People were heavy-hearted, and unhappy deep down within their being, because their souls cried out for God and Christ, whilst cowardly attachment to the things of earth stifled their yearnings and held them captive.

## CHAPTER II

### THE SANHEDRIN

**A** LONG, low, muffled sound disturbed the death-like stillness of the night, as Nicodemus knocked upon the portal of the castle before which he and his companion had halted—their journey ended. Dully the echo reverberated again and again and as the two travellers waited for an answer to their summons their gaze instinctively fell upon the princely mansion towering above them in the gloom—the palatial home of Gazar, the Sadducee, and of his kinsman Caiaphas.

Huge and impressive its massive bulk rose before them as a symbol of the power of him who was its master; and surely it looked a fitting abode for the one who claimed it as his home—Gazar, famed throughout Judea for his fabulous wealth and great possessions, the friend and loyal supporter of Rome—and yet withal a firm defender of Israel's traditions.

The dull grating of a bolt being withdrawn fell upon the ears of the travellers and disturbed their silent meditations. The massive oaken door swung inwardly upon its curiously wrought iron hinges, and in the passageway, revealed by the light shining from within, there stood a porter garbed in rich Oriental attire.

The glow of the light fell upon the two strangers at the door, and at sight of them the servant bowed low in obsequious salaam.

"May the Lord God of Israel give you peace," he said. "In His name ye are welcome to my master's house." And he closed the gate behind the visitors.

"May the peace which thou givest return unto thee a hundred-fold," replied the travellers. "We are Joseph and Nicodemus, councillors, and thy master, Gazar, awaiteth us."

Saying these words they bowed, and placed their hands upon their beards, as was the custom amongst the Jews; and in the brief moment which their action took, the servant surveyed them with a fleeting glance.

Their robes were long and flowing, as are the Oriental costumes even to this day. A full, loose tunic of white fell from the shoulders to the feet, save where it was caught at the waist by a cincture of golden chain made of finely wrought links. They were dressed singularly alike with large outer cloaks, loose and of rich material, about the bottom of which ran large deep fringed border of blue. Upon their heads were small pointed colored caps from which broad silken fringed streamers fell behind upon the shoulders.

The face of Nicodemus was old and wrinkled, and his hair and beard were snowy white. But in his face now seared and marked with the years there were written the unmistakable signs of gentleness and goodness; and in his deep blue, kindly eyes shone the light of love.

Joseph was a younger man by twenty years at least, but his fifty years of life had left their traces upon his figure and his brow. His hair was not yet white, but heavily streaked with grey and though there was not the same soft kindly glow in his eye, his face was none the less that of one whose heart is pure and good.

Upon the forehead of each man there was what to one unacquainted with Jewish customs would have ap-

peared inexplicable—a small oblong leather case not more than three inches in length strapped to the head and resting on the forehead. It was the phylactery so well known to the sons of Israel, which marked its wearer as a Pharisee.

Misinterpreting the words of the Book of Deuteronomy and Exodus that they should have the law as a memorial before their eyes, the Pharisees, a religious sect and a political party, had literally interpreted the words, making small leather sacks containing texts of Holy Writ graven on folded parchment. These small cases they wore upon their brow—"before their eyes"—that they might be righteous before God. Alas! how far they were from serving Him in spirit and in truth even if by outward signs they would have men believe them perfect!

Though Joseph and Nicodemus were Pharisees, and as such obeyed the ordinances laid down by this party which had wandered so far away from the spirit of the true religion of their fathers; yet, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, these two councillors were men in whose hearts God found a welcome home, and in whose lives religion was a real and vital issue, and not merely an external compliance with innumerable customs, as was, alas, its only form with many of their contemporaries amongst the Pharisees.

The travellers followed the porter through a narrow passageway, not more than five feet wide, paved with stone, its ceiling richly frescoed, the whole illuminated by a lamp of brass suspended from above.

Out through a wide open court he led them—a court surrounded on three sides by what appeared to be two storied houses wherein lights glowed dimly from the latticed windows. The home of Gazar was the palace of a man of wealth; and thus like the more pretentious

of the Jewish homes, it was built two stories in height. This court through which the porter was now conducting the guests was the outer or servants' quarters, and these buildings facing on it were the abode of the householder's retainers.

At the farther end of the court, opposite the door through which the men had come, two steps led into another inner court, the quarters of Gazar and his family.

This second court was lighted now by large lanterns and flares placed in convenient places, so that by their glow the two old men could discern the carefully laid out plots of grass and flowers: or, here and there, a stately palm or other tree of majestic proportions. Several walks paved with finely crushed gravel wound their way throughout this court, and the servant, choosing one, bowed to his guests to follow him. Round about them in the lantern-light they could descry the outlines of the rich man's palace, the lower story marked with numerous arched lewens or chambers, before each of which hung a heavy curtain, brilliant of color no doubt when the noonday sun fell upon it, but now in the pale artificial light, colorless and dark.

Following in the servant's footsteps, and still without a word, they came at length to a flight of steps opening from the court and leading on the outside of the building to the story above.

The steward stopped and bowed to his companions.

"My master is above, within the upper chamber," he said, "I shall conduct you thither."

Nicodemus answered, his voice deep and grave.

"We shall follow thee in the name of the Lord God of Israel."

They mounted the flight of broad stone stairs and found themselves upon a terraced floor or platform,

where the hand of man had planted a garden, the scent of whose flowers perfumed the night air. Before them opened many doors and passages—for they stood at last at the sanctum of the Sadducee.

Through halls and rooms built with marble and precious stone, high of ceiling and rich in color, illumined with brazen lamps, they walked behind their guide until at length he halted before a large portal—lofty and wide, molded in fantastic figures. A broad velvet curtain hung in graceful folds within its arch.

Once more the servant bowed with reverence and then addressed them.

“Behold the Council-Hall of my master’s house. He awaiteth you within.”

Stepping forward he lifted the velvet curtain, saying as he did so,

“Enter and may the God of our Fathers bless you.”

At his word they entered the large hall, revealed to their gaze through the partially lifted curtain.

It was paved with huge blocks, uniform in size and of purest marble. The walls unbroken by any windows were panelled in cypress and sandal wood, richly carved—the work of skilful hands. Within the hall running almost its entire length were two long divans, covered with draperies of royal purple, with here and there cushions of yellow. At the end opposite the portal ran another divan at right angles to the two longwise so that they formed a letter U. A seven-branched candelabra swung from the ceiling—itself a work of art—and flooded the room with a soft, rosy glow. In the closed portion of the U, that is at the part of the room opposite the door, stood a massive table wrought in finest gold, inlaid with silver and pearl. At either side of the door and at the furthest extremities of the room huge metal brasiers stood,

filled with ruddy coals, for it was midnight; and, even in Judea, the nights of Nisan were chilly.

The room was filled with what seemed a disorderly array of guests, some lounging upon the divans, some grouped together in little parties engaged in earnest conversation, whilst others pored studiously over scrolls of parchment, their brows knit as if the readers sought to solve some knotty problem. The buzz of many voices filled the room, and this scene of so much activity was such a vivid contrast with the peaceful stillness of the night which they had just left that for a few moments Joseph and Nicodemus stood still in wonder.

Then from the farther end of the room a man made his way directly towards them.

He was dressed even as the two who had just arrived, except that there was no border upon his cloak, nor did he wear the phylactery upon his head.

The assembled guests made a passage for him and bowed low in homage as he passed. Joseph and Nicodemus advanced a step to meet him, for he was Gazar, the Sadducee, their host.

Placing his right arm over the shoulder and touching each breast with his cheek he bade them welcome to his home.

"May the Lord God of Israel, our Father, give you peace all your days; and in His All-holy Name, ye are welcome to my house and all that I possess."

His voice was smooth, oily and urbane, as he pronounced the words—the tone of one who is schooled in the flattery of the world.

"May He bless thee and prosper thee all thy days," came the soft voice of Nicodemus.

"And keep thee and thy household," spoke Joseph, his companion.

Their host acknowledged their wishes with a bow of great deference.

"We were awaiting you, my friends," he went on; and as he lifted his face, one could not help noticing that, whereas the countenance of Nicodemus was soft and kindly, that of his host was crafty and cunning.

His hair and beard were nearly gray, his face was marked with cruel lines which aptly matched the deep set eyes of stony hardness and the aquiline nose.

The man's dress was faultless, and his manner courteous; but somehow as he stood a little bowed, rubbing his hands together, one felt oneself in the presence of a person whose urbanity was but a cloak of cunning, and who could be cruel and unfeeling in his dealings with his fellow men, and whose most poisonous thrusts would be concealed beneath a veil of friendliness.

Such was the impression that Gazar left, and such in reality was the character of this man who had amassed a fortune through dishonest means; and now, thanks to his astute dealings with the leaders of the Jews and the Romans, held a position of importance in Judea's capital.

A Sadducee by conviction and by choice, he hated and despised the Pharisees, and all they stood for. He and those like him who belonged to the party of the Sadducees still retained their belief in a Creator and a God but did not concede to Him any active participation in the government of the world. The Law having been given to the people, Jehovah withdrew into the repose of Eternity, they maintained, and abandoned man to his own free will, unheeded and unchecked. The immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the dead, and the existence of angels, were to them but foolish fancies; whilst works of penance were the idle pastimes of over-religious zealots.

Epicurean in their habits of life, their chief concern was the gratification of their hearts with pleasure; and all that tended to destroy peace or mar one's content must be eschewed.

Many of these Sadducees were priests of Jehovah; and though they still observed the law and acquitted themselves of their sacred functions, they were loud in their denunciations of scrupulosity regarding the Law of God.

They looked with disdain upon the people, nor did they despise the pagan and the heathen in their midst as did the Pharisees. Neither did they minimize their culture and their learning, but rather imitated them and cultivated the friendship of the Romans, and sought to crush whatever might hinder cordial relations with the foreigner.

Thus in keeping with his principles, Gazar was a loyal friend of the Imperial Empire. He loved her art and culture, he copied her ways, he praised her deeds. And yet for all his aping of the pagan customs he was wise enough not to be unmindful of his Jewish descent, nor to overlook the fact that it was most to his advantage to prove himself a worthy son of Israel if he would hold the respect and honor of his countrymen. Hence he was assiduous in the cult of Jehovah, he was faithful in all the external observances of the Law. There was no defender of his country's traditions stancher than he, so that the people looked upon him as a son eminently worthy of his fathers.

And so Gazar was content—content with himself and the success he had made of his life—and not a little, too, because ambition had brought him his nation's highest honor to a favorite son—membership in the great ruling body of Judea—the Sanhedrin.

"Come with me, my friends," he purred, rubbing his

hands with energy as he addressed Joseph and Nicodemus. "Come take your places. The entire council is now assembled."

The guests bowed low and followed their host as he led them forward, himself between them beaming geniality, but by his very attitude displaying a graciousness and kindness which were but artificial and forced.

With many signs of deference and outward marks of friendship he left the newcomers with a group of councillors near the farther end of the room whilst he hurried forward, and in a moment was lost to sight amongst the crowd.

A moment later the sharp rapping of a gavel upon the golden table stilled the buzzing of the voices and brought the gaze of the assembled guests in the direction whence the sound had come.

A soft mellow voice was raised in the hushed room.

"My brothers," it said, "we are all assembled. May it please you to be seated that we may begin our session."

A moment of disorder followed as the men hastened to recline upon the divans whilst the speaker waited.

At length all was silent again. The men had taken their places and were turned all attention to the man at the table.

He was of medium stature though of bent form and his beard of snowy white fell full upon his breast. His face was soft and pleasant though wrinkled with advancing years. Such was Gamaliel the president of the Sanhedrin.

His gaze wandered for a moment over the assembled council. It numbered seventy-one in all, men most of them aged like himself, dressed in robes of varied hues, long, flowing and ornate which marked their station.

Singularly alike they looked, there in the light of the council room, but in reality what a diversity of opinions, rank and station they represented. There were Pharisees who were zealots in the observance of the Law and whose hypocrisy and vaunted self-righteousness made them hateful to the people. There were Sadducees whose love for wealth and friendliness with the heathen made them an object of disgust in Pharisical eyes. There were scribes, the doctors and interpreters of the Law, together with the Ancients chosen from among the elders of each tribe and family. In a word there were men of every type and shade of political opinion in Jerusalem—hopelessly divided amongst themselves, with individual animosities which frequently made them bitter enemies, but now presenting an external appearance of unity in this upper room.

How sadly and how far from the high standard it had maintained in the days of Israel's glory had this ruling body fallen! Once it had been composed of the very flower of her sons, men chosen by God who with a high consideration for their sacred duty to the nation ruled with justice and love. Now it was for the greater part made up of political intriguers who thought but little of their high office.

Truly, it had seemed that God had shown His displeasure with the degraded Sanhedrin by the manner in which He had visited His vengeance upon it. For He had permitted the Romans to crush it and curtail its power, robbing it of every vestige of its former greatness, despoiling it last of all of its once boasted power of passing sentence of life and death. In truth, this Sanhedrin assembled in Gazar's home was but a gaunt shadow of that Sanhedrin of other days, a council in name only, hopelessly divided by inward strife and

contention, made up for the most part of men who by their very lives were a blot and a reproach to the Chosen People.

"Men, brethren," began the voice of Gamaliel, "may the Lord God of Israel descend into our midst and bless our deliberations."

He raised his eyes towards Heaven as he said the words, and the assembled councillors looked with awe upon him expecting some solemn pronouncement.

Again he spoke, and his hearers strained their ears in expectation of his words.

"It is not without reason that ye are summoned at this unusual hour and in this unwonted place. We are members of the Sanhedrin and it is the will of the Lord God of Israel that we should be His mouthpiece unto the people. I would not bid you come, my friends and brothers, were there not an affair of the greatest moment to discuss; nor would I have you leave the City's walls and come unto this unaccustomed meeting-place were it not necessary that our deliberations be held in secret, and care exercised lest news of our session spread unto the people before it be in keeping with wisdom that they should know of it."

He paused, and eagerness mingled with anxiety were clearly written upon the faces of his listeners.

"As the President of this august body," he continued, "I declare the meeting opened, and I invoke the benediction of our Father in Heaven, Jehovah, upon it; and I implore from Him, the All-bounteous One, to give to each of you the guidance which the discharge of your high office demandeth."

Again he paused and crossing his hands upon his beard looked up to Heaven, his lips moving silently in secret prayer.

His hearers, still reclining, followed the example of

the president, placing their left hands upon their breasts and praying to the God of their fathers.

Another moment and Gamaliel resumed.

"Brethren, ye are set to guide the destinies of God's Chosen People and to rule them in His name. Ye are placed on the watch-towers of Israel to preserve His children in the ways of truth and righteousness. Ours is a high calling and a sacred duty to God and our fathers. I pray then to the great Jehovah, your God and mine, that He may enlighten us that we may see and know the true and the right, and that He may guide our deliberations and our judgments by His wisdom, lest perhaps we, who are the leaders, err, and in erring, bring ruin and disaster to those who are entrusted to our care."

He stopped, and the council members moved uncomfortably, their anxiety increasing. Surely the solemn tones, the grave demeanor, the very look of tenseness of Gamaliel revealed to each man present that this session would bring before them some matter of supreme importance.

Gamaliel lifted the ends of his cloak and wound them about his arms till they were concealed from view, all the while seemingly unmindful of his act, as if lost in thought he had transcended the things of earth. But even as the members watched him in awesome silence he resumed speaking.

"I would not detain you further, brethren, for it is late and our business is pressing. Once again I invoke the blessing of the Almighty upon you and with all my heart I beg Him to guide you that your judgment may be fair and according to His Holy Will."

He pronounced these last words with such earnestness and prayerful entreaty in his voice that his hearers were startled and sorely perplexed.

"For the rest, brethren, I shall call upon him who hath been chosen from amongst men by the God of our fathers, anointed in His name and set in our midst as our chief and our father—the High Priest of the Law."

Gamaliel bowed to a person reclining at his right hand on the divan—one swathed in soft rich robes of white and purple and blue.

The old man resumed his place upon his couch beside the golden table as the figure in the gorgeous robes arose and stood before the Sanhedrin—Joseph Caiaphas, the High Priest of Israel.

## CHAPTER III

### CAIAPHAS

THE light from the candelabra fell full upon the High Priest before the councillors.

Tall, erect and dignified, Caiaphas presented a striking appearance in his costly robes. His head and shoulders were thrown well back revealing a face whereon were carved the unmistakable evidences of cruelty, disdain and pride. The forehead was high and broad, the sharp black eyes glowed like steel, deep set beneath their brows of blackest hue. The nose was long and arched, yet finely shaped; and though the features of the man were handsome in their own peculiar way, there was about the mouth a hardness which showed itself in the thin, tight-set lips drawn back and drooping at the corners. The lines about that mouth bespoke a harshness prompted from a heart, which was itself like flint—the heart of one in whom pity and mercy were unknown quantities and to whom justice and kindness were mere shibboleths.

The very appearance and posture of the man told in a word his character—a Sadducee, cold, unscrupulous and cunning, full of pride and ambition, caring not a whit for his fellow man, nor hesitating to use to his own advantage whatsoever might serve him, even though he do an injury to his neighbor. And, indeed, this summing up applies in very truth to the man, Caiaphas, known as he is in the light of his deeds to

history and tradition; for never was there a more unworthy priest of the Law than this proud Sadducee.

The reader will gather from this sketch of Caiaphas as well as from the description of the Sanhedrin in the preceding chapter what kind of judgments one might expect from such a body; and readily can he understand the fervent prayer of the God-fearing Gamaliel that the Lord of Hosts might look with mercy upon them and guide their deliberations. Surely they needed the help of Almighty God!

Caiaphas waited for a moment until quiet reigned in the room, and then he smiled. But that smile which crossed his countenance was rather a grimace of disdain—the cold, patronizing smile of one who looks down with contempt upon his fellows.

"Brethren," he began, and his voice, though polished and cultured, was cold the while, "by the supreme will of the Lord God of our fathers, Jehovah, the stupendous powers and the exalted authority of the High Priesthood of His Chosen People have been vested in me, His most unworthy and humble servant."

He bowed before him and to either side so that his gesture embraced the entire assembly.

One sensed the mock humility of the man as he pronounced these words, the hypocrisy of the heart which prompted them. For there was not a councillor amongst the assembled throng who was not aware that this weakling was the tool and servant of Rome, appointed to office by the procurator Valerius Gratus, when the lawfully elected High Priest Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, had been expelled by the Roman masters. It was said, even openly, that Caiaphas had purchased his position at a great price, and although he had now occupied his office for some sixteen years, it was merely at the will of Rome.

Once the highest office of the Chosen People when its incumbents were men of blameless lives and unquestionable probity chosen by God and invested with His high power, how low it had fallen now when such an unscrupulous man as Caiaphas should occupy the seat once filled by the saintly Aaron! How fettered and enslaved that priesthood, once so free and unworldly; for now it was held in bondage by a pagan empire, Rome, whose officers kept in their custody even the very garments and robes used by the High Priest in his sacerdotal ministrations in the Temple, and who must obtain permission from the Romans before he might procure and use them.

Surely the time was ripe for the coming of the Son of God to deliver His people from the servitude and oppression of these unworthy priests, who ground the people down whilst declaring themselves to be the representatives of the All-just God!

Caiaphas continued after a moment.

"The affair which demandeth our consideration this night," he said, "is one of such importance that we must consider and weigh it diligently. One hath arisen in our midst who by lying words and utterances seeketh to delude our people and by His sacrilegious deeds hath profaned the Sabbath and outraged the traditions which we hold so dearly. Defiantly He hath withstood the doctors of the law and sought to bring discredit upon them, even daring to hold up to ridicule our nation's teachers."

The speaker paused and the tension of the meeting being somewhat relieved by his act, exclamations of wonder and indignation were heard on every side.

The President rapped with his gavel upon the golden table. The murmuring subsided and Caiaphas continued.

"These things though serious pale into insignificance beside the outrages and offenses of more striking character which He hath committed, namely that He hath by seditious language, traitorous utterances, and unfriendly actions, sought to incite the populace to bloodshed and revolt, and to destroy the peace and happiness of our nation by an open rebellion against the power of Rome."

A momentary gasp of surprise and wonder escaped his hearers as the speaker paused for a breath before resuming.

"Such an one as He, is, my brothers, a menace to society, an obstacle to amicable relations with the Imperial City; and it is the duty of us, members of this Sanhedrin, to resolve upon the course of action we must pursue in dealing with a man who is so obviously a traitor to our nation, her religion and her traditions."

He stopped for the fraction of a second before he went on again, whilst the members awaited in breathless anxiety.

"He to whom I refer is known to you all, my brethren. He is called Jesus, the Son of a carpenter of Nazareth. I call upon you to decide His fate. That is the object of this meeting."

With ringing bitterness he spat out these words, and ending with a flourishing gesture resumed his place upon the divan. But his words had the desired effect.

Now most of these councillors were, like the speaker, Sadducees, friendly to Rome; hence the very mention of this man, Jesus, being the cause of any unpleasantness with the Empire was of itself sufficient in their eyes to condemn Him.

An animated discussion amongst the members followed the High Priest's address—a discussion featured by angry gesticulations on the part of many, and of

loud denunciations from others. But one could see that the councillors were incensed and determined to pursue the matter to its very limits.

Gamaliel arose and struck his gavel upon the table, but for a moment its sound was lost amidst the angry outbursts of the men. Gradually peace and order were restored; then the President spoke solemnly and with earnestness.

"Brethren, ye have heard from the lips of the High Priest the object of our meeting. We must decide the fate of this Man called Jesus who is accused unto you of the crimes set forth by Caiaphas, my lord. But I would beseech you, my brothers, in the name of the God of Israel, to put anger from your hearts and to judge Him only with fairness and with charity. Let not your hearts and minds be swayed by prejudice or unworthy motives; nor let your decision be aught but what justice shall demand. Remember, my brothers, that He hath done much good amongst the people. He hath brought happiness and comfort to many a lonely life, and cured the lame and sightless. Weigh then his good deeds with the bad and judge Him not too harshly. I commend Him to your mercy in the name of the God of Israel. I am ready now to hear what ye will say."

He sank back wearily upon the divan.

A note of entreaty had come into Gamaliel's voice as he pronounced these last words and there was evidence of the earnestness of one to whom the verdict would mean much, the plea of a man to whom the ultimate decision of the council would be of weighty import.

A lull followed; then from the farther end of the room, a Pharisee, Caleb by name, arose and addressed the meeting.

"In my humble opinion," he began, "it is meet that this man called Jesus should be made to suffer for His actions. For, many times He hath inveighed against us and in scathing terms He hath denounced us. Such an one as He, is, I contend, my lord President, worthy of severe chastisement."

Amidst the applause and huzzas of the meeting he resumed his seat as another member took the floor—a Pharisee like the preceding speaker.

"Is it not true, my brethren, that this man hath a devil?" he inquired. "Hath He not cast out devils in the name of Beelzebub? Hath He not been guilty of unholy conduct? What reason then impelleth us to refrain from meting out to Him punishment commensurate with the evil He hath done?"

Loud cheering greeted the speaker as he sank back amongst the cushions and for a moment the only sound in the room was that of wild disorder and commotion. But amidst the general shoutings and noise of the meeting several could be noted who, taking no part in the demonstration, looked with serious or even sorrowful countenance upon their brethren or talked in undertones together. These were they who favored the man known to them as Jesus, the Carpenter, and who would have no part in His condemnation.

When the noise had somewhat subsided an old man, grave and feeble, raised his hand, and his action drawing the attention of the President, that official smiled at him and nodded.

A frail piping voice cut in upon the subdued whispering in the hall, as the old man, Johanan by name, spoke.

"My brothers," he said, "age hath so pressed me down that I am unable to stand before you, so I must address you from my couch where infirmity holdeth me

captive. But decrepit and palsied though I be, I would beg you hearken unto me and heed my voice."

All eyes were instinctively turned towards a divan near the centre of the room whereon an old man rested upon one arm propped up amongst his cushions—a man clothed in white and purple. His face was pale and wax-like, his eyes deep-sunken in their hollow sockets, whilst his beard of white fell full upon his patriarchal bosom.

"Though fourscore years and ten have laid their burdens upon me, and robbed me of my former strength and energy, still, my brothers, I take my place with pride amongst you as a councillor, happy to do my duty to my God until He call me home."

So weak was the man that even those words had cost him a considerable effort but he continued courageously.

"Close on sixty years have I sat as a member of this Sanhedrin and helped to make my nation's laws. With men illustrious in our country's annals have I served, who though now passed away are still revered in memory. Oft-times have I heard Hillel read the Law and Simeon speak in Council. High Priests without number have I seen made and pass away; and in all these years proudly do I boast that I have been ever the champion of justice, nor will I now digress from the habit of life-time."

He paused to take a breath and the silence was painful until he began again.

"Tonight we are summoned to hear the case of One called Jesus, and to judge Him and His actions. No great perception doth it require on my part, brethren, to note that ye are incensed against Him, and that rancor filleth the hearts of many in this council; and did I not raise my feeble voice in protest on His

behalf I would myself be a party to your prejudices and do Him an injustice. He is a Man like you and me, a Jew as we, a child of God, and, even though His lot in life be poor, for He is but a carpenter's Son, He, too, must have from us justice and I shall be His champion. Some evil hath He done, maybe, even as ye and I; but the good that He hath wrought by far outweigheth the bad, and this I bid you to consider."

He stopped and from Caiaphas and Gazar and many others of the council, looks of scorn and hatred were directed towards the speaker. But unmindful of them all he resumed.

"Have ye seen Him, my brothers? Know ye aught of Him except through idle gossip? Some of you maybe have heard Him; others, perhaps, have turned away and refused to listen to Him. But to you, one and all, I shall speak. Maybe it is the last time I shall ever address this council, for my steps grow more tottering day by day; but if in this last instance I shall persuade you to do justice to this Man called Jesus I shall be content that my life's work is finished. One thing I would ask you, brethren, that ye bear in mind. To me, ye are not Pharisees or Sadducees. Ye are, all of you, alike to me, my brothers, in a common father—God. Ye know me well—my life, my deeds. Ye know I owe allegiance to no political party nor to any sect. I hold no brief for Rome, nor do I crave her favor. I look now only to my dissolution, and eternal peace with God. Knowing my integrity then hear what I, an old man, worldly-wise yet unbiased, would tell you of the Christ. I have seen Him many times, I have heard Him preaching to the multitudes and never have I heard Him say aught but what was in keeping with the law of Moses. I have seen His works amongst the rich and poor. My eyes have gazed

upon the cripples He hath cured, upon the lepers He hath cleansed, upon the sightless He hath restored, and in these things I do not see the evidence of an evil-doer. Much have I prayed my brothers that God might let me know the truth concerning this Wonder Worker, and hear ye now what after much pondering is my conclusion."

Eagerly the members strained forward to hear the feeble voice of the patriarch, for he was regarded as somewhat of a prophet himself amongst many in Israel, and his word always bore much weight amongst the people. Slowly and with emphasis he pronounced the words :

"I believe He is a Prophet sent to us from God. Reading the sacred scrolls and all they tell of Him who is to redeem our nation, into my soul there hath come the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah promised to our people by Jehovah. Suffer Him then to go His way in peace nor dare ye to molest Him. Brethren, I have finished."

Breathlessly he sank back upon his couch and the other councillors were so surprised at the old man's words that for a moment utter silence filled the room as the members looked in consternation upon him who had made such startling utterances.

Joseph and Nicodemus side by side exchanged some words in an undertone, and the face of each was strangely lighted with a look of joy.

Caiaphas glanced with contempt upon the seer, whose words had so stirred the council. A man who reclined at Gamaliel's left hand took the floor.

The President's gavel smote the table once again; then Annas, the deposed High Priest, father-in-law of Caiaphas, advanced a step to speak.

A surly scowl of anger crossed his wizened face.

His cold, grey eyes looked out upon the meeting. Then in a voice, harsh and grating, he began in tones of bitterest sarcasm.

"Were years of service in the council a pledge of one's integrity or a gauge of trust my brethren, then I might say to you behold a faithful son of my fathers; for threescore years have I spent in the service of my country and the Temple. Like my brother, Johanan, I, too, have heard the famous Hillel, and sat beneath the illustrious Simeon, father of Gamaliel our President."

Smilingly he bowed to the chairman, and then resumed.

"But surely some foul fiend hath come into the soul of my brother Johanan and troubled his spirit that he should speak unto us such unholy words as those which he did but presently pronounce, acclaiming as a prophet and messiah a simple carpenter, who by the people's testimony hath disobeyed Jehovah's law and spurned His precepts. Was it such an one as He that Hillel and Simeon bade us await? Do holy men and prophets lead the populace away from God; do they perform the deeds which our holy books ascribe to Satan? Brethren, I appeal to you to answer, for ye are doctors learned in sacred lore. But mark ye well, Jesus is a malefactor and must be condemned."

He finished with a ring of bitterness in his voice which completely dominated those who for a few moments had been made to hesitate by the words which Johanan had spoken.

The thin shrill voice of the patriarch rang out amidst the clamor in the room.

"To God alone doth it belong to bring a dead man back to life. And today the man called Jesus raised from death Lazarus of Bethany, who for three days

lay within the tomb. What think ye then of Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Sitting together on their divan Joseph and Nicodemus exchanged glances in which were mingled excitement and eagerness. With sorrow in their hearts they had listened to the stern indictment of the Master from the Pharisees and the Priests, and a great fear had seized them that there would be no person in the assembly to raise his voice in defense of Jesus. Gladly would they themselves have proclaimed His innocence had they but dared, but once again cowardice sealed their lips and they held their peace. Then Johanan had proven himself the champion of the Christ and though the two old men dared not applaud his action openly nor make it known that they believed in Jesus secretly they rejoiced that the Master had one friend at least amongst their number.

And all the while, unmindful of the turbulent session of the council seeking to condemn Him, Jesus, the Carpenter, reposed in Bethany, deep in sleep.

In the noisy whispering of the councillors following the last utterance of Johanan, Gazar, the Sadducee arose and smiling genially about him addressed the meeting.

"Men, brethren, let not asperity find place amongst us, nor acrimony enter into our deliberations. Surely such an one as Jesus is not worthy to divide us, or to create ill-feelings amongst our members. Johanan, my aged brother, I respect and love. His patriarchal dignity I revere. Annas, my lord, I honor as a Priest of Jehovah even as I love you all in God our Father."

His tone, smooth and deprecating, instantly claimed the attention of the gathering.

Annas and Caiaphas watched him eagerly, for he was their kinsman; and his reputation as a diplomat

was well known to them, and they felt that now, even as in the past, his cunning art would be turned to their advantage and that his clever tongue would extricate them from the difficulties which the meeting had brought about. For these priests with many others of the council, filled with envy at the growing popularity of Jesus, signs of which were evident amongst the people, had secretly decided to ensnare Him and to have the council pronounce His condemnation and ultimately His death. This decision had been reached at a private conclave held earlier in the evening and attended by a number of the more bitter of Jesus' enemies in the council—a group of both Sadducees and Pharisees presided over by Annas and Caiaphas. This coterie was of sufficient strength to influence the entire body to arrest the Master and have Him punished. At the outset of the deliberations of the Sanhedrin there was not the slightest doubt in the minds of the High Priests that the meeting would decide against the Christ. All knowledge of this private session had been carefully kept from the main body of the Great Council; hence the proceedings in the Council Hall had been carried out with all precision and detail as if the Sanhedrin in-council-assembled were really to decide the fate of Jesus.

In Johanan the High Priests had encountered an unexpected champion of the Lord and this old man's words bore such weight and his authority was so great in the chamber that the arch-plotters feared that he might perhaps have sufficient influence with the members to persuade them to allow the Carpenter to go His way free and unmolested. The very thought of such a contingency filled the Priests with a maddening rage. At all costs Jesus must be punished, and severely. He had brought odium upon them. He was usurping

their power. He minimized their worth and took from them the honor and the respect of the multitudes which they had for years enjoyed. He, a simple illiterate Carpenter from Galilee, had set Himself up as a teacher. Johanan had inquired if the members knew aught of the Christ. Caiaphas and Annas smiled grimly at the remembrance of the query. Yes, they both had seen and heard Him and they hated Him with all the ardor of their being nor would they be content till the council had condemned Him.

Yet they knew it were not wise to seek to coerce the Sanhedrin. That would be bad policy and might have an effect opposite to that intended. Better far that the present meeting adjourn without making a decision than that it decide in favor of the Christ. At all costs that must be averted! So they listened with much eagerness to Gazar's words, hoping that as many times in other days he had saved an awkward situation so now his tongue would aid them.

The wealthy Sadducee cast a glance at Johanan reclining peacefully on his cushions, then went on.

"Johanan, my trusted friend, hath his own idea of Jesus, and deeply I respect it. Annas, my lord, likewise hath formed concerning this Man a judgment which in my heart I also honor. So each of us and all my friends have formed opinions of the Man. But shall we let such selfish reasoning impede the honorable discharge of duty? We are not private individuals, brothers, judging by the standards of our own conjectures. We are members of the Sanhedrin, public servants, whose duty it is to consider and to pass some judgment on the actions of this man known as Jesus, the Carpenter's son. And our judgment, brethren, must be based not upon personal conclusions as to his moral standing as a man; but rather must it be formed

upon his conduct as compared with that norm which is set forth for every loyal son of Israel in our sacred scrolls. If then after diligent and fair consideration of His conduct when judged by that standard given to us by God, we find that Jesus hath digressed from the path of righteousness, then it is our solemn obligation to have Him apprehended and brought before this council so that we may impose upon Him sentence equal to His crime. If He hath done aught which before the Law is reprehensible, then no matter what in private I may think of Him, even though He were my brother I would let Him suffer for His deeds, for such would be my duty."

He stopped again and several members of the assembly nodded in approval.

"Let us not waste time then in idle talk. Either Jesus is guilty or He is not. If not, then our meeting is ended and we have no further cause of action against Him, nor is it necessary to have Him arrested. Will ye pass sentence then upon His actions or will ye free Him? Or will it be said of you that ye permitted individual feelings to sway your judgments and private convictions to vitiate the workings of this council?"

Gazar was a speaker of much worth and his voice ringing out with conviction in the room won many of the waverers from Johanan.

Annas, Caiaphas and many of their followers were much pleased and as the Sadducee paused they engaged in whispered conversations.

Gamaliel restored quiet with the gavel as the speaker raised his voice again.

"One word further I would say, my brothers. Be He a simple carpenter or a great prophet He must not be permitted to do aught which might incur for us the anger of the Empire. Peace and prosperity have vis-

ited us brethren since Pontius Pilate hath been our governor nor have we cause to murmur against the Roman save in this that we are but slaves in bondage. But that servitude we must endure till Israel's saviour come; when, marching beneath his banner we shall free our nation from the fetters of the foreigner. Until that time arrive we must be patient, and in our dealings with the pagans, wary. It would but do an injury to our cause were we to tolerate revolt against the Roman Governor, or permit sedition to find footing amongst the populace. He then who would seek to foment strife amongst us, is, by the very fact, a disturber of the public peace; or, as it seemeth well to some to say, a malefactor. Brethren, such an one is Jesus. Ye know that He hath called Himself a king, and claimed unto Himself a kingdom. Is not that seditious? Mark ye my friends I have no grudge against Him. I do not even know Him nor do I base my conclusions upon my own poor reasoning powers. I judge Him solely by His actions with regard to the public peace. But I warn you, brethren, that unless He be checked, we shall incur the anger of the Romans who will not hesitate to visit vengeance upon us."

He leaned forward and spoke very slowly and deliberately.

"Ye know I count many friends amongst the Roman lords, and sometimes things are borne to me which are not meant for popular knowledge. But I shall not break a trust or be unfaithful to my Roman friends, in telling you that the foreigner is incensed because this Jesus is permitted to go abroad preaching open sedition, and the Governor contemplates some drastic move against the people unless the Christ be apprehended."

He resumed his seat amidst the prolonged cheering

of the crowd. Caiaphas cast a knowing smile at him, well aware that the Sadducee had lied to strengthen his arguments. The Romans were not incensed against Jesus, nor had they expressed disapproval of His teachings.

Fear was written on many a face because of the hint thrown out by Gazar that Rome contemplated some action, and for some moments a veritable pandemonium reigned in the hall whilst councillors disputed warmly and argued with much vehemence.

The President's hammer knocked, and order was restored.

The frail voice of Johanan broke in again upon the meeting.

"He claimed unto Himself a kingdom—aye—but did He not add that His kingdom was not of this world?"

The words electrified the assembly and it seemed that another discussion was to be precipitated. The countenances of those who were in favor of the Carpenter lighted as they thought that His cause was to be championed. Joseph and Nicodemus looked hopefully about them.

Johanan drew a breath and continued.

"Why condemn a man when He is not present to defend Himself? If ye would judge Him, summon Him before you that He may speak in His own cause."

An angry scowl crossed the face of Annas as he opened and closed his clenched hands as though he fain would crush the emaciated patriarch. Gazar bit his lip in suppressed anger whilst Caiaphas trembled with very rage.

From another portion of the divan a man lifted his voice.

"Aye, there are many of us who believe the same. Let us hear the man Jesus in His own defense."

The speaker had scarcely finished the words when Caiaphas jumped to his feet, beside himself with anger and flushed with passion. Gone were the self-control and urbanity which he had displayed all through the meeting. He now showed himself in his true colors—a haughty, unjust priest bent upon the condemnation of an innocent man who must be adjudged guilty at all costs. The sentiment of the meeting must not swing back again to Jesus! He would see to that!

Death-like silence fell upon the assembly as the High Priest fairly shouted out in a voice of icy bitterness.

"Ye know nothing. This man, Jesus, is working many miracles. If we let Him go on acting thus all will believe in Him and the Romans will come and destroy our city and our nation. Ye are Jews and citizens. Arise, shake off lethargy and be loyal to your country. It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and that the whole nation perish not."

A wild shout of acclaim followed the speaker's words. The meeting was ended. Caiaphas and his coterie had won. It was decided that Jesus was to be arrested. The order was given to the members by the High Priest who instructed them to seize the Carpenter as soon as possible that He might be put to death.

Little did Caiaphas realize that he had spoken a prophecy and that Jesus would die for His nation. Unworthy though he was, he was the successor of Aaron and once again God placed His Oracle upon the lips of the High Priest of the law.

Quickly the guests departed and in a few moments the hall was empty.

Here and there in the passageways leading from the

building some groups were loud in their denunciations, whilst others with downcast eyes walked sorrowfully into the dawn just breaking. These latter were the friends of Jesus.

Joseph and Nicodemus entered the chariot of Gamaliel and with him they drove hastily from the Sadducee's home. But their way did not take them to the Holy City. The horses' steps were guided in the direction of Bethany and thither with all speed they journeyed.

Day was purpling the eastern skies when at length the travellers arrived in the little suburb. They went directly to the home of Lazarus and knocked upon the portal. Their summons was answered by the resuscitated councillor himself.

"The Sanhedrin hath decided to put Jesus to death," said Nicodemus, "and seek now to take Him. We have come to warn Him and to bid Him leave the country with all speed."

Lazarus thanked them and without further conversation the travellers left him.

Shortly after, just as the sun was lighting the gilded dome of the Temple, Jesus and His apostles turned their backs on Bethany and the country of Judea and withdrew well within the borders of Perea to a town called Ephrem there to spend the last three weeks of His life.

Madly the Sanhedrin sought Him that day and many others during the two weeks that followed, but none betrayed His hiding place and even the command of the ruling body that anyone knowing the whereabouts of the Christ should deliver Him up, had not the desired effect of giving Him into the power of His enemies.

## CHAPTER IV

### AURELIANA

IT was well past noon on a day scarcely a week after the events narrated in the preceding chapters and the great market place of Jerusalem presented a scene of much activity.

The Feast of the Passover was now drawing near and already multitudes were flocking in exceedingly large numbers to the Holy City for the Festival. From every nation under heaven they came, yet all looking to the City of David as their mother and their true home. The population of the capital was almost doubled by this influx of visitors and the city's accommodations sorely taxed. Every available space was taken; and many, unable to find shelter, had erected tents beneath the city walls.

All day these strangers dressed in holiday attire flocked in great numbers through the streets of the city, visiting friends or sight-seeing; and on this afternoon of which we write the market section of the capital was thronged with vast crowds, newcomers as well as the ordinary population of Jerusalem, so that the narrow streets and lanes of the district were much congested. Stretching from the Joppa Gate and extending in every direction innumerable bazaars or Oriental stores were erected, and amongst them pressed the shoppers intent upon some purchases before the religious rites of the Pasch would begin.

It would be hard to imagine a scene more picturesque than this Jewish market, or to conceive a greater disorder than that which it presented—a disorder of things and colors and sounds.

On both sides of the streets and in all directions a veritable multitude of awnings met one's gaze—awnings of every bright and gaudy color, sometimes red, sometimes of striped material, yet all serving the one purpose of shielding the owners from the glare of the sun. And these stallkeepers themselves presented an appearance worthy of the picture in which they were set.

They were men of every nation and clime intent upon the disposal of their wares at the greatest profit! Jews in white or brown tunics with cloaks of every hue; Egyptians whose swarthy countenances contrasted vividly with their huge white turbans; Persians squatting on their rugs of priceless value; Greeks; Medes; Syrians; Arabs—all dressed in costume characteristic of their native land, each finding in Jerusalem a home and a profitable market. For the walls of the City of David no longer sheltered only the Chosen Children and the descendants of the tribes of Israel, but becoming like unto Imperial Rome, a seat of pagan power, commerce and unholy practices, numbered amongst her population countless thousands of heathen and idolatrous strangers.

The shrill cries and shouts of these merchants filled the air as they strove to attract the attention of the passers-by to the wares they offered—dates, figs, apples, pomegranates, articles of silver and gold, precious stones, rugs of Oriental texture, silks from China, wine from Italy, veils from Arabia, baskets from Egypt and household goods from Sidon—for these men plied all the trades and arts pursued in large cities then as now.

Round about the stalls prospective customers gathered, and with many gesticulations bargained with the sellers, whilst up and down the narrow streets the crowds promenaded gaily.

The confusion of the place was indescribable. Donkeys and mules whined as their masters sought to hasten their pace with a prod. Fowls cried lustily from their pens, and dogs barked savagely. Now and again a camel groaned as if in longing for his desert-home, and his cry mingled strangely with the bleating of the lambs and the sheep, or the singing of the birds of varied plumage offered for sale by the dealers. And as a background for this strange symphony of sounds arose the excited buzz of the people mingled with the screaming of children. Truly there is no scene in all the world which can compare with an Eastern market!

Great numbers of those who had come up to Jerusalem for the feast and were now amongst this throng in the market place were unacquainted even with the very Hebrew language of their fathers. They were children of the Dispersion, who, whilst retaining the old religion of their forbears and journeying to the Holy City in compliance with the Law, maintained their own peculiar customs and manners and spoke the languages of the countries of their adoption. These descendants of Israel numbered millions scattered over the known world, and many of them had attained to places of wealth and importance in their homelands.

Above the clamor of the market place suddenly there sounded a long clear trumpet-call. Its brazen note resounded again and again as the crowds paused for a moment at the signal. To the visitor who had but recently come to the Holy City or to the strangers from abroad that sound could not have the same signification as to the sons of Israel who claimed Jerusa-

lem as their home. To these latter its meaning was but too well known. It announced the advance of some Roman personage of rank and station. To the Roman it might bring a tinge of honest pride, but to the Israelite it could recall only with bitterness his country's sad plight, held as she was in the bondage and servitude of the hated Roman.

As it is essential for a proper appreciation of the events which follow, to know something of the political condition of Judea at this period, the reader will pardon me if I recall the status of the Jewish people at the time of Christ.

A long series of internal strife and dissension had resulted in the government of the Promised Land falling into the hands of the Romans; and at the time of which we write Judea and Samaria were joined as one Roman province annexed to the Prefecture of Syria and ruled by a Procurator or Governor who communicated with Rome through the Legate of Syria at Antioch. But this official was not permitted by Caesar to establish himself in Jerusalem as the Jews would have desired; rather, the seat of Government was fixed at the Roman city of Caesarea some 70 Roman miles from the Holy City.

With bitterness in their hearts towards their conquerors, the children of Israel had seen the haughty Romans come, and with defiance occupy the places made sacred to the Chosen People by the traditions of their fathers. Daily the tramp of the foreign legions was heard in the streets. The loathsome Roman standards floated on the breeze, and the Imperial Eagle was flaunted publicly in the faces of the conquered Jews. Caesar's soldiers garrisoned the kingly city, and overlooking the very Temple itself a Roman fortress reared its ugly bulk.

Pagan art and culture were introduced whilst Jewish practices were openly scoffed at by the victors. More and more as time went on did Rome make her oppression felt. Her tax collectors and excise officers became obnoxious by their system of extracting the tribute. Her officers and legionaries lost no opportunity of wounding the sensibilities of the Jews until at length the people of Israel came to despise the foreigner; and groaning beneath the yoke of servitude looked forward with longing to that day when the Saviour promised by Jehovah would come to free the nation.

That this Saviour would be a great champion and military hero none doubted; and they yearned for that hour when, summoning the youth of Israel to his standard, he would march forth to crush the power of Rome and restore the Chosen People to their former glory. How sadly their hopes were blasted; how little they understood the words of Holy Writ, for the King was even then in their midst and they knew Him not!

With this short sketch of conditions and of the feelings of the Jews toward the Romans the reader will understand better the effect of bitterness which the trumpet call produced in the hearts of Israel's sons assembled in the market place.

Another long blast! Then around the corner of a street nearby there came into full view of the crowds a gorgeous Roman equipage..

Quickly the crowds made way on either side, the inhabitants of the city casting sullen glances upon the carriage, the strangers looking upon it in breathless wonder. For what a spectacle it presented!

It was a beautiful golden carriage mounted on great bronze tired wheels and drawn by two magnificent white horses whose trappings were of polished leather

mounted with silver and pearl. Long purple velvet hangings fringed with gold rested across the animals' backs and at their heads guiding them walked two stately Roman grooms dressed in tunics of purple and gold with shining breastplates and helmets. Before them rode a trumpeter with an instrument of burnished brass upon which he blew his warning to the crowds of the approach of a member of Roman aristocracy. Behind the carriage rode three soldiers in full martial dress, shields, spears and coats of mail.

Four poles at the corners of the carriage supported a silken canopy from which golden fringe hung in graceful folds half-way down, so that it not only shielded but also partly concealed from view those who sat within the vehicle.

Embossed on either side of the conveyance was the emblem of Imperial Rome—the Eagle.

Slowly the carriage made its way through the crowded streets until at length it stopped before a bazaar of pretentious size. The proprietor—a Greek goldsmith—hastened to the chariot, but before he reached it one of the passengers had already alighted. By her features and her dress it was evident at a glance that she was a Hebrew.

The gaping crowds which had followed the course of the vehicle with mingled feelings of bitterness and wonder now gasped in speechless amazement at this sight of a daughter of Israel travelling in the carriage of Roman aristocracy. When they had partially recovered from the shock which the discovery had occasioned, many of them turned away their heads in disgust at such an unholy sight whilst others hissed the woman. But unmindful of them all the latter addressed the Greek.

"I have come for the bracelet," she said simply.

He bowed deferentially as he replied:

"It is ready, my lady, I shall procure it for thee," and with the words he disappeared within the shop.

The sunlight fell full upon the Jewess, Rebecca by name, and revealed the features of a woman of some forty years. She was dark, not over-tall, and with a soft kindly face. A simple tunic of pale blue fell gracefully to her feet. She wore no jewellery upon her person.

The man was back in an instant. She gave him a gold coin, and to his words of thanks she replied with a kindly smile, and in the Greek language.

"My mistress Aureliana will be much pleased."

He bowed again as she left him. A Roman attendant helped her into the carriage and the party moved off amidst the hisses and the wonder of the crowds.

Some of the more curious having pressed about the Greek had overheard his conversation with the Hebrew, and quickly the information they had acquired spread amongst the people, some of whom exclaimed with bitterness:

"It was the Lady Aureliana who was within the carriage, and the Hebrew woman was her maid."

Others explaining to the newcomers from afar said,

"The Lady Aureliana is the daughter of Donatus, a Roman Commander in Jerusalem."

The more vehement amongst the crowds exclaimed,

"So the hated Romans have come back again to spy upon us during the festival days. May the God of our fathers hasten the day when we shall be liberated from the galling yoke of the foreigner."

And yet others burst forth into fiery tirades against the Empire, whilst those who were of the Sadducees held their peace.

Meanwhile the golden carriage continued peacefully

on its way through the crowded streets towards the Royal Bridge which connected Mount Sion with Mount Moriah over the Valley of Tyropheon below.

At length Rebecca spoke:

"It is hot and sultry, my mistress Aureliana, wouldst thou that I fan thee?"

"Nay, I thank thee," said Aureliana, the only other occupant of the carriage; and for a few moments all was silent again.

Presently the Roman lady bestirred herself amongst her cushions, and laying her hand upon the Jewess' arm inquired in a kindly tone:

"In what section are we now, Rebecca?"

"We are nearing the Royal Bridge, my lady," replied the maid.

"Ah, it is well," whispered the girl as she sank back wearily in the couch.

This young Roman lady presented a striking contrast to the Hebrew. Whereas Rebecca was, as we have said, a woman of near forty years, this girl beside her was scarcely nineteen. The former in her simple costume and with her Jewish features was obviously a daughter of Israel. But the lavish dress of her mistress and the elegance of her person marked her for what she was, a Roman lady of aristocratic position. She was the Lady Aureliana, daughter of Donatus, a Commander of the Roman Army in Jerusalem. The latter had come to the city from Caesarea a few days before, in company with Pontius Pilate the Governor to maintain discipline in the Holy City during the festal days of the Passover.

"What wouldst thou further before we return to thy castle, my lady?" asked Rebecca in tones of earnest solicitude.

"Ah, nothing, I think, Rebecca," replied the girl.

Then after a moment she resumed. "Thou art kind, my dear," and as she pronounced the words a smile lighted her countenance.

It was a beautiful face of clear complexion with just the slightest tint of olive, denoting the girl's Italian origin. The slender nose, the finely molded features, and the artistic brow looked as though they had been chiselled from precious alabaster by some skilful sculptor. There was in that countenance a look of candor, love and kindness, which one associates with those whose hearts are pure and good. One felt sure that those delicately curved lips could not utter harsh or cutting words, but would speak only in accents of affection. How fragile appeared the Lady Aureliana reclining there amidst the silk and velvet trappings of her coach.

"Rebecca," she spoke softly again in her musical voice, "what hour is it now?"

"It is near the ninth hour, my lady," answered the Hebrew.

"Ah, thank thee," said her mistress, and lapsed into silence.

A slanting ray of the sun from Mount Sion to the west stole into the carriage through the fringes and falling upon the Roman girl lighted her graceful figure.

Low at the neck revealing a beautifully molded throat, the tunic which Aureliana wore was fashioned from a rich material of a delicate lemon shade, bordered with a texture of silver. About her neck was clasped a band in which gleamed pearls and diamonds of purest lustre. A cincture studded with precious stones gathered her tunic at the waist forming the skirt which fell in graceful folds to her dainty sandaled feet. Upon her person gleamed jewels of rare value, heirlooms perhaps of ancestors in far-off Rome.

Around her neck hung a slender golden chain supporting an amulet. A stola of soft orchid hue draped her shoulders yet partially revealed one shapely arm. Surely its exquisite loveliness needed no adornment and yet withal as was the Roman custom beautiful bracelets clung caressingly to it. The gentle breeze from the valley below playing with the girl's nut-brown hair, peeping out beneath a veil of Indian silk, wafted on the air the sweet perfume which her garments exhaled.

But all unconscious of her beauty and her grace, oblivious of the fact that she was reputed with the loveliest of Roman ladies, Aureliana lay back listlessly in her carriage deep in thought.

Her eyes were closed as though she slept, but one quickly put this thought from mind, as one perceived that her tapering bejewelled fingers toyed with the bracelet which Rebecca had but lately procured from the Greek bazaar.

Surely this fair young aristocrat presented a picture of meekness and gentleness, scarcely reconcilable with our idea of haughty Roman ladies. And yet, Aureliana's character did not belie her appearance, for even as a flower of great beauty is sometimes found to bloom in stony soil, so, too, this girl beautiful of character and kind of heart had grown to maturity in an age and at a court where dominated pagan selfishness and cruelty.

Presently she stirred restlessly again.

"Where now, Rebecca?"

"We are entering the Royal Bridge, my lady," answered the Hebrew maid.

"Then we are nearing my father's castle," replied Aureliana listlessly and lapsed into silence. In a moment the carriage had entered the bridge.

What a colossal structure it was! Well indeed was it regarded as one of the marvels of Jerusalem in the days of Christ, for resting on immense stone arches it spanned the valley of Tyropheon at a height of two hundred and twenty-five feet, and formed a grand avenue of entrance from Sion to the Temple on Moriah opposite. From its elevation one could obtain an excellent panoramic view of the Holy City extending below, and to every side.

We would bid the reader take his place beside the carriage in which the Roman girl was travelling, and gaze for a moment upon the spectacle which unfolded itself—Jerusalem, the City of God.

Behind the carriage—that is to the west—were situated the Cenacle, the house of Caiaphas, and Herod's castle—places well known and sacred in Christian tradition, for they were all on Sion. Beyond the Mountain and to the north lay Calvary.

Over the parapet of the bridge gleamed in the sunlight countless roofs of the castles, palaces, and houses of the city, whilst innumerable narrow streets threaded their way in and out amongst them. Picturesque clusters of green marked fertile orchards, and misty colorings bespoke thriving gardens all peacefully basking in the glorious sunshine beneath the blue Eastern sky. Away on every side beyond the city walls, pretty suburbs nestled amongst the hills.

Directly in front of the carriage—that is the east—on Mount Moriah rising in all its grandeur was the pride of the Jewish nation—the Temple containing the Holy of Holies.

Terrace upon terrace, from Ophel below, rose the courts of the Temple, till the mighty edifice towered over the city as the sentinel of God. Contiguous to it and to the north, the Roman fortress and castle of

Antonia reared their walls, and beyond these again were situated the quarters of the city wherein dwelt Donatus, the father of Aureliana.

To the east of the Temple Mount, across the Valley of Josaphat, Olivet loomed; and at its base Gethsemane, which holds sad recollections for Christians.

The silvery notes of a trumpet came floating sweetly on the breeze from the east.

The Lady Aureliana sat up, and placing her hand upon her companion's arm, listened.

The sound faded gradually, only to be repeated again and yet a third time.

"The trumpet-call, Rebecca," said the Roman.

"Aye, my lady, we are nearing the Temple now. It is the trumpet blown by the priests to announce the evening sacrifice."

"The evening sacrifice," softly murmured the other.

"Aye, my lady, the evening sacrifice to Jehovah, the God of Israel."

Aureliana paused a moment and then spoke kindly.

"Rebecca, if thou were free at this moment, what wouldest thou do?"

"I would betake myself unto the Temple, my lady, for it is the hour of prayer for the Israelites, it is the ninth hour."

Her companion considered a moment, then timidly addressed the servant.

"Rebecca!"

"Aye, my lady."

"I have never been to thy Temple. Could I not go with thee now whilst thou offerst thy prayer, thy duty as a daughter of Israel?"

"But thou art not a Hebrew, my lady. Thou art a Roman, and thou payst homage to other gods."

"Other gods?"

"Aye, the gods of Rome."

"Ah, but Rebecca, since thou hast told me of Jehovah and of His prophet, Jesus, who is called the Christ, I have thought much and often of Him; and I can no longer find within me my former love for Roman deities."

"But, my lady," answered the older woman, "Jehovah is the God of Israel, and Jesus is His prophet. We who are Jews are His Chosen People."

"But since I have heard of Him from thee; since I have learned from thy lips the deeds of the Wonder Worker, Jesus, I too, even though I be a Roman and a pagan, respect thy God and His prophet. Could I not pray to Him even as thou? Would He not lend an ear of pity unto my voice?"

The other was sorely perplexed at the words of her mistress, and hesitated before answering. She loved and respected this kindly pagan whom she served, nor would she wound her feelings by the slightest act which might cause her pain. Yet Aureliana was a heathen, and as Rebecca argued within herself could never hope to share the privileges of the Chosen ones of Israel. So, though she must hurt the girl in the telling, she felt it her duty to inform her that the Hebrew nation alone were the elect of God; and that none other could deign to share His favor and His love, for so she had been taught since childhood years by the rabbis in the Temple and the synagogues.

"Answer me," pleaded the lovely lady beside her, hopeful that Rebecca's hesitancy might be of good omen. "Answer me, and tell me; for I should find comfort in adoring thy God and in serving this Man of whom thou speakest much—Jesus of Nazareth."

She paused an instant; then resumed:

"O Rebecca, thou canst not understand how lonely

and unhappy I am. My very being crieth for a God of love and pity, whom I can adore and serve. But my country's gods, fashioned from stone and clay are lifeless and unfeeling and cannot satisfy me. I see thy people, Rebecca—the Hebrews—slaves in bondage though they be, so happy in the service of their God who to them is living, real, and understanding; and I yearn to love and serve Him, and have Him love me, too, in turn."

With tenderness and sympathy, knowing her words must wound this fair lady, Rebecca answered:

"Forgive me, my mistress, if I seem unkind or hurt thee, for such is neither my wish nor my desire. But thou wouldest know the truth and I must tell thee. I would that I might change thy destiny, and make of thee a Hebrew; for then only couldst thou serve Jehovah. With the Hebrews only, did our God make His covenant. We alone are His Chosen People whom He will save."

She laid her hand gently on her mistress' arm as she continued.

"It would not serve thee then, my lady, to pray to Him. He could not listen to thy prayer, for thou art not one of His children."

Tears glistened in the woman's eyes as she turned her face away, a heavy feeling pressing about her heart, conscious that she had pained this girl whom she loved so much.

"Nay, I am not one of His children," mused the other. "It is useless then to pray to Him. And yet, withal, how much I long for Him. Day by day I hear the trumpets blown by the priests. I know it is the hour of prayer again, and that the multitudes will bow down in homage before this God, who is love and peace all-abiding. Oft-times I stop myself lest I raise my

unworthy voice in some spontaneous act of prayer, stop myself as I realize that I am a stranger in a strange land, whose God must always be a stranger to me. O Rebecca," she broke off suddenly in a strained voice, "surely He would heed a pure and righteous heart. I am a Roman, it is true, but if I bow before thy God and ask Him to accept my prayer and make me happy, surely He would hear my voice."

The Hebrew woman looked steadily before her and her eyes were misty.

"Think not unkindly of my words, my lady. I am but a poor Hebrew woman, not worldly-wise or learned; and I have told thee only what the doctors of the Law have taught me. But, sometimes, I too think even as thou, that the great Jehovah would not despise a humble and righteous heart."

"Ah, thank thee," said the other with much feeling. "Then I may come to the Temple with thee?" she finished, pleadingly.

"Aye, my lady, we can at least enter the court of the Gentiles. None is debarred from that."

"Ever kind and gentle Rebecca," softly added the Roman.

The carriage was drawing near the Temple Mount now. Clearer and clearer to view came the courts, gardens and porticos rising majestically on Moriah with the noble façade of the glorious fane of Jehovah high above.

Rebecca sitting forward viewed the spectacle with rapture, losing sight of no detail of that wonder of her nation, even though she had oft-times before feasted her eyes upon its beauty.

But, reclining peacefully amongst her cushions, the Roman girl saw nothing of the magnificence of the scene. The Lady Aureliana was blind! Three years

before, she had suddenly lost her sight whilst at her home in Caesarea.

Thus unto the Mount of God came two hearts of pure and honest purpose—the Lady Aureliana, the beautiful though blind daughter of a Roman general, and Rebecca, a Hebrew servant, each of widely different stations in life, but both led by the same desire of praising and adoring Jehovah, the God of Israel.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TEMPLE

**R**EBECCA, tell me hast thou seen the Christ since we have come unto Jerusalem? Much wert thou accustomed to speak to me of Him when we were at my father's home in Caesarea or even when in other festal days we came unto the city here in company with the Governor's retinue. But now although a week hath passed since we have returned to the Holy City thou hast spoken but little to me of Jesus whom thou wert pleased to call the Wonder Worker. Hast thou not seen Him, Rebecca, or is it that thou no longer believest in Him? What reason impelleth thee to keep silent regarding Him?"

Thus spoke the Lady Aureliana, as with her maid she reclined upon one of the marble benches which surrounded the walls in the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple on Mount Moriah, whither the two women had repaired at the wish of the blind girl.

"It is not because I do not think of Jesus, my mistress, or that I disbelieve in Him that I have not spoken to thee of Him. It is because I have not seen Him and I am sorely disappointed."

"Hast not seen Him! But surely, Rebecca, thou knowest well that I have no objections to thy following Him. Rather it did please me much to hear thee speak of Him. Why didst thou not mention it to me

and I should have gladly sent thee to hear thy Master again."

The Hebrew woman paused a moment, her gaze fixedly before her.

"With longing in my heart," she began sadly, "I looked forward to this time when returning with thy household I should come unto Jerusalem: for I hoped that I should see and hear the Christ again. Arriving in the city I sought Him at once but He is not here."

There was a sob in the woman's voice as she finished the words, almost in a whisper.

"Not here," said the other. "But where is He?"

"I have inquired amongst the people," replied Rebecca, "but none can tell me whither He hath gone. 'Tis said by some that He hath betaken Himself secretly to a remote region and that He is in hiding."

"But why, Rebecca, should He conceal His resting place? Why should He remain hidden from the people?"

"Not from the people doth He hide Himself, my mistress, but rather so 'tis said, from the High Priests and the rulers of our nation."

The Lady Aureliana said nothing, but reclining peacefully on the bench, reflected a moment, a puzzled expression on her countenance.

"Forgive me, Rebecca," at length she said. "I am not a Hebrew as thou, nor do I rightly comprehend the customs of thy nation. The rulers of thy Temple have, no doubt, their own peculiar code of laws nor do I understand them. But tell me, thou, regarding them and Jesus whom thou callest the Christ: did not this Wonder Worker do great things amongst the people? Did He not tell them of thy God, Jehovah, and instruct them in the ways of goodness? Thou thyself hast told me that He is called a prophet by the

people. Why then should He conceal Himself from thy priests and rulers? Rather it would seem to me that He should dwell with them in unity."

Pity and sadness were clearly visible upon the face of Rebecca as she made answer—pity for the beautiful girl beside her, sadness that the Christ no longer walked amongst the people.

"My lady, it is said that Jesus hath concealed Himself because the Council of our nation hath decided to put Him to death if He appear in public."

The Roman girl gasped in amazement.

"To put Him to death," she cried. "Rebecca, what is this that thou sayst? Surely thou dost jest."

"Nay, my lady, would that I did. It was decided at a meeting held in secret some days ago that Jesus must be taken and condemned. Word hath gone forth from the High Priest Caiaphas unto the people bidding them to disclose the whereabouts of the Christ if perchance they have knowledge of His place of hiding."

"But, Rebecca, what reason do thy rulers give that they should seek to kill a Man who hath done much service to His nation? Thou thyself hath told me much of Him. Even I, a pagan, believe Him more than mortal man. One who maketh the dumb to speak, the blind to see, is surely god-like. Even pagan Rome deifieth her illustrious sons; she doth not kill them. Surely, then, a people which claimeth itself to be the Chosen Children of a supreme God acteth strangely, when it seeketh to put to death a Man who doth the works which are themselves the prerogatives of a god. Forgive me, dear, if my words sound harsh. I do not mean to wound thee; but, in truth, the ways of Israel are strange."

She lifted one jewelled hand and groping through the space which separated her from Rebecca sought in

that pitiful manner of the blind to touch the servant's arm, as if by the contact she might soften the sting which she imagined her words had contained, for she would not willingly hurt the lowliest creature.

The Hebrew understood the action of her mistress and in her kindly way made answer.

"Fear not, my lady. Thy words are but too true. Israel indeed acteth strangely, nor do I commend her rulers when they seek to put to death One who hath done such deeds of goodness amongst us."

"Then canst thou imagine why the rulers plot His death? Is He not a prophet and thou thyself hast oft-times told me that a prophet is an envoy of thy God, Jehovah, to the people. Surely a prophet is worthy of the treatment accorded to the Master whom he representeth."

She stopped and smiling said half jesting:

"Remember that though I be a pagan, thou hast taught me much both of thy nation and thy God. Be not surprised that I should question thee regarding the Christ. Why do they seek the death of One who is a prophet, aye, greater than a prophet?"

"My mistress," answered the Hebrew woman with much tenderness in her voice, "it pleaseth me that thou shouldst seek to know concerning Jesus, who is called the Christ. Pardon me, then, if I express in faulty terms what in my heart I feel regarding thee. For if my words be badly chosen, or to thine ears seem harsh, it is not that I would offend thee. Thou art a Roman of much wealth and position. I am but a Hebrew servant, poor and lowly; and it is only by thy grace that I may speak familiarly with thee. Forgive me, then, and understand what I would say to thee. It is this, that in my heart I wish that thou wert an Israelite even as I, that thou mightest adore Jehovah for thou

art surely worthy to be a follower of the God of Truth."

Aureliana said nothing, but the jewelled fingers closed upon the Hebrew's arm. The latter, fearing that her words had displeased her mistress, glanced at her. But in the blind girl's face there was a look, not of anger or of wounded pride, but rather of much suffering caused by an interior longing of her pagan soul for that light which comes alone from God. The sunlight stealing into the Court from the west falling on the maiden's countenance showed the tear-drops glistening as they slowly rolled down her cheeks.

"Forgive thee, didst thou say, Rebecca?" she murmured softly. "Ah, I, too, wish that I were an Israelite, that I might call thy God my God and be happy. The brazen images, the idols of stone, the Roman gods can never bring to me that peace and contentment which the God of Israel giveth to those who are His own. Ah, Rebecca, I envy thee for I am unhappy and yet I thank thee, for through thee I have learned to know a little of thy God and His prophet, Jesus."

The servant gently stroked the Roman's head, but answered nothing, realizing perhaps that it were idle to utter words or phrases which could never effect what God alone could do.

For several moments the silence which had fallen between them was not broken; then the maid-servant bestirring herself as if from a reverie began softly:

"I shall tell thee, my mistress, in my own poor way why the priests of our people seek to put Jesus to death."

"Tell me, for I long to know," said the other.

"Many centuries ago, my lady," began the Hebrew, "the Lord God Jehovah selected Israel as His own, and promised our nation that we should be His Chosen Peo-

ple for ever. Adverse conditions have reduced us to the condition of slaves, but still doth Israel hope, for in our Holy Books, so our rabbis teach, a Saviour is promised who will one day restore to our people their former greatness. Him our nation awaiteth with longing. Many generations have passed, and still the Promised hath not come. Now, however, it is said that the time is at hand when the prophecy will be fulfilled and the Hope of the Eternal Hills will appear. 'Tis said He will be a king, my lady: that He will be surrounded with wealth and splendor and clothed in purple."

"Israel's promised Saviour will be a king!" murmured the blind girl. But the other, not heeding the remark, continued in a voice full of emotion.

"John the Baptist, the prophet whom Herod put to death, announced that the Saviour was at hand. Shortly after the Man called Jesus, publicly proclaimed Himself unto the world as the Son of Man, the Saviour; and by His words and wondrous works hath led the people to believe He is the Christ, the Son of God."

"The Christ, the Son of God," softly whispered the Roman girl, and she seemed to speak the name of the Master in accents of love and affection.

"Angered that this man Jesus who is but a humble carpenter of Nazareth should dare to assume unto Himself a kingly title and fearful lest He cause sedition, the ruling body of our nation, the Sanhedrin, gathered, it is said, in secret council and decided He must die."

"Decided He must die!" exclaimed Aureliana. "But surely they have acted unjustly, if in secret they have determined upon His death. Even Rome will not condemn a man without fair measure of justice and surely it might be expected that Israel would not put

to death One who claimeth power from Jehovah, unless it be decided after open investigation that His claims are false. To put to death Jesus, the Wonder Worker!" she exclaimed again. "O, Rebecca, what think the people, what thinkest thou of Jesus who is called the Christ?"

"Publicly He hath unmasked the Pharisees and showed their hypocrisy unto the world. He hath done in public the works which one who cometh from God alone can do. My lady, the people believe, even as I that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that in Him will be fulfilled the prophecies of our Holy Scrolls, and that soon He will declare Himself a king and prove Himself the Saviour."

"But He is now in hiding! When will He proclaim His kingship?"

"Soon, I warrant, for the time is now at hand."

Aureliana clasped her hands before her, and with fervor in her voice exclaimed:

"Ah, would that the day had come!"

Then, as though suddenly realizing that she was a pagan and hence debarred from the glory attendant upon the proclamation of the royalty of the Christ, she murmured sadly:

"But I am not a child of Israel. He can mean nothing to me. Thy people must always look upon me as an enemy and an oppressor because I am a Roman. I may never share the glory of the Son of Man."

Rebecca knowing well the teachings of the rabbis that none but an Israelite could claim fellowship in the Messianic Kingdom said nothing, though in her heart there welled up a great flood of pity for this blind pagan girl who longed to know the God of Truth.

Silence fell between the two women, and for some time no word was spoken.

Aureliana, reclining on her couch, her eyes closed, was deep in thought. Beside her the Hebrew, her lips moving in silent prayer repeated some Jewish canticle, or perhaps one of the beautiful psalms of David. Beyond, the priests and the people in the Sanctuary and in the Court of Israel offered sacrifice to the Lord God of Hosts.

The Court of the Gentiles or the outer court of the Temple, wherein sat the two women, was a vast enclosure seven hundred and fifty feet square. It was bounded by a double row of Corinthian pillars, all monoliths wholly cut out of one block of marble each thirty-seven and one half feet high. The floor of this great area was paved with the finest variegated marble whilst innumerable porches or halls formed by the pillars and columns afforded convenient meeting places for friendly intercourse and discourse of those who came to the Temple.

From this Court of the Gentiles none was excluded so that even the pagan might come here provided he observed due decorum. At a little distance within the court stood a marble slab four and one half feet high bearing inscriptions in Greek and Latin cautioning Gentiles not to proceed further under pain of death.

On this afternoon as Aureliana and Rebecca rested within one of the porches countless multitudes were no doubt flocking in and out of the Court, for it was near the festal season of the Passover, when preparations were in progress for the feast, and many thousands of visitors were already in the capital. Many of these strangers were seeing the glories of the Temple for the first time, and we can well imagine their exclamations of delight and wonder as they gazed upon the mag-

nificence of the holy fane. Possibly their words of praise fell upon the ears of the two women reclining on the bench.

From their position the latter could hear the shoutings and angry protestations of the buyers and sellers in the square bargaining over the oxen and sheep and doves selected as fit for the sacrifice of the Temple and sold in this court. Here, too, were the tables of the money-changers which the Gospel tells us Christ overthrew when He drove from His Father's house those that bought and sold.

Beyond the Court of the Gentiles rose the Court of the Women, then that of Israel, which led into the Court of the Priests and finally into the Sanctuary of the Holy of Holies.

Nine great gates led from the Court of the Gentiles into the inner courts, gates, eight of them, two-leaved, high and wide, covered with gold and silver plating. The ninth, or eastern, gate was of dazzling Corinthian brass richly ornamented; and so massive were its double doors that it needed the united strength of twenty men to open and close them. Was it any wonder that this was known as the Beautiful Gate?

Truly this Temple of Jerusalem was a marvel of architectural grandeur! Imperial Rome could boast of her pagan shrines, Athens might exult in her palaces of wealth, but no city in all the world could rival the Jewish Capital in the possession of the splendors of the Temple. Nor has there been, either in ancient or modern times, a sacred edifice equal to the Temple, whether for situation or magnificence; nor have there been festive throngs like the joyous multitudes, hundreds of thousands in numbers, who with chants of praise and hymns thronged the holy shrine, itself a

mass of snowy marble and gold glittering in the sunlight against the green background of Olivet.

"The crowd is great," said Aureliana, "for though I may not see I hear the murmur of many voices."

Rebecca bestirred herself and gazed out upon the pressing throngs hurrying in and out of the Temple.

"Aye, my lady," she said, "there are great multitudes, for it is near the Feast of the Passover; and the people have flocked unto the city in accordance with the Law."

"The Passover?" inquired the other.

"Aye, my lady, the feast on which we celebrate our freedom from Egyptian bondage and the commencement of the existence of Israel as a nation."

The Roman girl was silent for a moment and her face wore a grave expression as though she sought to solve some problem. Then a smile passed over it and lighted it, as in her musical voice she said:

"Ah, now, I remember. Thou didst tell me before of the Passover, didst thou not?"

"Aye, my lady."

"And is it not the feast," went on Aureliana, smiling and much pleased with her knowledge of things Judean, "the feast when the head of every house must slay a spotless lamb?"

"Aye, thou art right. Thou knowest as much of Israel's laws as I," lightly answered Rebecca.

Aureliana seemed happy because of the Hebrew's words and laughing softly she continued:

"And is it not thy law that every Israelite physically able, and who is not unclean before thy God must come unto the city for the festal celebrations?"

"Aye, truly," said the maid. "I would that one so familiar with our customs and our laws might serve the God of truth."

Aureliana did not answer but on that beautiful Roman countenance one could read a tale of inward suffering and strife. Truly, this young aristocrat was sorely afflicted. She longed to see again the light of day denied her now for three years since blindness had overtaken her. She yearned also to see the Light Divine, the Light of God's Truth from which she was debarred by Jewish law because she was not an Israelite.

But seldom did a murmur of dissatisfaction or a grumbling word escape the lips of this fair lady, blinded in soul and body, for she had learned to suffer silently and with resignation.

For some time no word further passed between the two; and in the silence Rebecca secretly lisped the words of a Psalm, whilst now and again the lips of the Lady Aureliana moved as if in prayer. Who knows, perhaps, she too offered from her pagan heart an invocation to the Lord of Israel?

In the west the sun was slowly sinking behind the Hill of Sion, and already the long, slanting rays falling upon the Temple making dark shadows where the Corinthian columns bounded the Court, proclaimed that the short Eastern day was drawing to a close.

"Rebecca," whispered Aureliana, "it is growing late and we must return. Is our carriage in waiting?"

"I shall go at once to tell the slaves that we are ready," said the latter. Hastily arising she went towards the portal where they had left the equipage.

The blind girl now alone was silent for a moment. Then softly she murmured in a voice full of emotion and pathos:

"Lord God of Israel, I am unhappy. The gods of Rome can never bring comfort to me since I have learned of Thee from my Hebrew servant. I wish

with all my heart to serve Thee but I may not because I am a Roman. But if Thou art the great and powerful God that Rebecca claimest surely Thou canst find some way to hear and help me."

A voice beside her surprised and startled her.

"I am poor and wretched, help me in the name of the God of Israel."

The frightened girl drew her robe more closely about her and recoiled momentarily at the sounds of the coarse voice addressing her. She could not see before her, of course, the unkempt figure of an Israelite clothed in rough, tattered garments; nor could she know he was a beggar. She only heard a harsh voice speaking in Aramaian and that voice had beseeched her in the name of the Jewish God.

"Who art thou?" she asked.

"I am Enan, a beggar," replied the other.

"What wouldst thou?" she inquired kindly.

"An alms," answered the beggar.

Now Aureliana was the only daughter of a wealthy Roman noble. She neither carried money with her, nor did it ever happen in her life that she had need of it in making purchases. A score of stewards and servants fulfilled her slightest wish and procured for her whatever she might need at the great emporiums. The beggar's request showed her in an instant her inability to help him until Rebecca should return with the purse. She thought a moment. Then her hand stole slowly to her left arm where clung the beautiful bracelet which shortly before the Jewess had procured at the Greek bazaar. The ornament was of great value and had been a gift to her from her father on her birthday. She had other bracelets and rings upon her person, she had jewellery of much value, but she prized this latest treasure most of all. Still the beggar

had asked an alms in the name of the Hebrew God and she was determined to make a sacrifice. Had not Rebecca told her many times that real sacrifice consisted in giving what one loved and valued most?

Slowly she removed the golden bracelet. Her fingers caressed it longingly for a moment; then she handed it to the beggar saying as she did so:

"This I give to thee in the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel, and of Jesus His prophet."

Eagerly the beggar accepted the gift and with expressions of profuse thanks left her.

Alone again Aureliana whispered aloud to herself:  
"Jesus, I did it for Thee."

At a short distance from her three men had watched the scene with much interest, and had overheard her words. They drew near to her as the beggar left. One of them was old and infirm, and leaned heavily upon the two others, who walked on either side supporting him as he made his way feebly along. His long white beard flowed upon his breast; his face was pinched and lined. The man on his right was also advanced in years; the one on his left appeared to be younger.

They were now at the side of the blind lady, and the old man in the middle addressed her.

"I heard thy words, my child. Thou hast done this kind deed to the beggar for the sake of Jesus. It was a worthy act, and He will repay thee, for He hath said that even a cup of water given in His name will have a just reward."

It was the old man, Johanan, who had spoken, he who at the council meeting had defended Jesus, and with him now on either side were Nicodemus and Joseph of Aaimathea.

Unaware of their approach Aureliana was greatly

startled by the sound of their voices and seeking to arise extended her arms, feeling about her in the blackness as is the custom of the sightless. At a glance the men perceived that the beautiful lady was blind, and a feeling of great pity filled their hearts.

"I did not know that thou hadst seen or heard me," she said, not unkindly.

"Aye, daughter, we saw thy act and heard thy words. With compassion we note that thou art blind. But have patience, Jesus will repay thy kindness."

Sadly the girl replied:

"I would that I might serve Jehovah. But He could not, would not hear me. I am a Roman."

Joseph and Nicodemus exchanged glances as the old man Johanan resumed.

"Dost thou believe in Jehovah?"

"Aye," she answered. "My Hebrew maid-servant hath told me of Him and of His prophet Jesus, who is called the Christ."

"Then if thou believest in Him, He will hear thee and make thee His child even though thou be a Roman."

"But kind sir," she said breathlessly, "my maid hath told me many times that an Israelite only can be heard by Jehovah."

"Aye, so the rabbis teach," answered the old man, "but Jesus who is a prophet, hath arisen and in the name of the Most High God, He hath taught otherwise. Just shortly since, He spoke to a Samaritan woman. He cured a pagan ruler's son, He hath bade the Gentiles hope for He hath declared 'many other sheep my Father hath which are not of this fold. These too I must gather until there be but one fold and one shepherd.' "

"Then I may hope?" eagerly questioned the girl.

"Aye, my child, pray to Him and hope. He will one day hear thee."

"Ah, I thank thee. Thou hast made my life more happy," said the girl. But the old man had already moved on and left her.

When Rebecca returned a few moments later to inform her mistress that the carriage was ready she found the Lady Aureliana in tears of joy. Quickly the blind girl recounted to her maid all that had transpired in the latter's absence and at the mention of Johanan's name the Hebrew woman said:

"My mistress, Johanan is regarded as a seer and a prophet by many in Jerusalem. Thou mayst feel assured that his words will be fulfilled and that thou shalt be made a child of Jehovah although how I cannot tell. Maybe this great blessing will be given to thee through the kindly offices of Jesus who is called the Son of Man."

Together the two women left the Court of Gentiles, and entering the golden equipage, turned towards Antonia and the Roman quarters to the north where dwelt Aureliana.

A great burden had been lifted from the blind girl's heart. A new hope had entered into her life that some day she would be happy. And Rebecca, beside her in the conveyance, pondered much upon her mistress' words.

Thus each of these two women driving over the Roman roads thought of Jesus the Carpenter, and wondered if He who was now in hiding might not one day come into the life of the Lady Aureliana, daughter of Donatus, a Commander of the Roman Army in Jerusalem.

## CHAPTER VI

### FAUSTINUS

**A**LTHOUGH two weeks had elapsed since the meeting of the Sanhedrin at which the death of Jesus had been decided upon, and though every effort had been put forth by the priests and the rulers to apprehend the Christ, so far no success had attended their endeavors.

Cautiously, inquiries had been made concerning His whereabouts from those whom the High Priests thought might have some knowledge concerning Him; but these, whether through ignorance of the place of the Master's abode or through suspicion that some evil was planned, supplied no information.

Messengers were secretly dispatched to seek Him in His former favorite haunts, some even going to Carphanum, Galilee beyond the Jordan, and even to Trachoniditis. But in spite of all searching the Christ and His apostles remained unmolested in the country of Perea.

It was not the intention of the ruling body that the populace should become aware of the Sanhedrin's plans regarding Jesus, but in spite of efforts at secrecy, a rumor had somehow spread amongst the people that the council had decided upon the death of the Wonder Worker. The news caused no little indignation, especially amongst the lower classes which dwelt about Ophel; and suppressed murmurings against the ruling

body were heard on many sides, all of which caused great concern to the Chief Priest and his associates.

Caiaphas was enraged at the failure of his emissaries to apprehend Jesus, and was bitter in his denunciation of them. In scathing terms he rebuked the Sanhedrin for having allowed the Christ to slip from their grasp two weeks before at the time when their meeting had been convened, and thus having been the cause of the failure of well-laid plans.

"Should it become generally known to the people that we seek to put Jesus to death," he had said, "they will flock about Him and acclaim Him a hero. Then not only shall we have failed, but we shall hold ourselves up to the ridicule of the common herd."

This statement he had made at a second meeting of the council a few days previous, but even this rebuke had failed to effect the capture of the Christ.

In the very midst of their dilemma and on the eve of the Sabbath, word was brought to the High Priest that at last Jesus had been located, and that even now He was on His way up to the Holy City for the Passover now just a week off. The news threw Caiaphas and his associates into a state of the wildest consternation.

They were well aware that Jesus counted many friends in Jerusalem and these would no doubt rally about Him especially since He had raised Lazarus from the dead a fortnight ago. His popularity would now be so great, they feared, that their own influence with the people would be completely lost if they did not take some action against Him. On the other hand, if He were taken publicly by the priests upon His arrival there was the possibility of arousing hostility toward themselves which might even terminate in a riot. In addition there was another element which

they must consider—the presence of thousands of pilgrims in the city for the feast of the Passover. These latter would require careful handling, for they were strangers and might be induced by the people to join a revolt against the rulers, if such were perpetrated; or again they might rise in protestation against what they might term injustice towards the Carpenter, if He were taken and condemned upon His entrance to the Holy City.

So now that Jesus was approaching the Capital, Caiaphas and the rulers were sorely perplexed as to how they should deal with Him, though of one thing they were determined, that for their own safety and well-being He must die.

Something must be done and done quickly, for tomorrow was the Sabbath when it would be illegal to act.

Gazar and Annas were speedily summoned to the High Priest's house on Mount Sion and acquainted with the news.

When he had explained the situation fully Caiaphas turned to his listeners.

"What shall we do?" he queried. "For if we allow Him to go unmolested He may perhaps incite the populace to revolution during the very days of the Passover."

"Would it not be wise to summon the Sanhedrin?" asked Gazar.

"Nay, indeed," cried Annas. "Did we not have enough trouble with its members at our meeting two weeks ago? Were it not for thee and Caiaphas, Johanan would have prevailed and all our plans would have been ruined. Whatever is to be done must be decided by us at once."

Silence followed these words, and one could see that the three men were deep in thought.

At length Caiaphas spoke.

"Gazar," he said, "thou art friendly with the Romans. Go to them secretly. Tell them that we fear Jesus is about to incite a revolution against the Empire and thus enlist their aid in apprehending Him. Then, should the people be incensed against us, we can protect ourselves by declaring that He was taken at the command of Rome because of the rumor that He was unfriendly towards her."

A smile crossed the haughty countenance of the High Priest and the cold tones of the man were deliberate as he propounded the scheme.

The suggestion was received with pleasure by Annas and Gazar, who sighed with relief that a solution had been found.

"We knew thou wouldest find a way," cried the crafty Annas.

"I shall be pleased, indeed," beamed Gazar, rubbing his hands vigorously.

"Then lose no time," said Caiaphas, "for already the day is advanced and the Sabbath is on the morrow."

Gazar arose and taking his cloak bowed low.

"I shall go at once," he said, and a look of hatred came over his countenance as he finished with the words, "this time Jesus will not escape me."

In an instant he was gone. Annas and Caiaphas left alone smiled knowingly at each other.

"No better instrument could have been found than Gazar," said Annas.

"Nay," quoth Caiaphas, "for he hateth Jesus with a deadly hate since that day the Carpenter drove the money-changers from the Temple."

Both laughed heartily. Then the High Priest Caiaphas raising his eyes piously to Heaven said in accents of great earnestness:

"Lord God of Israel, I thank Thee that at last a way is opened to us by which we may rid Judea of this blasphemer, Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ."

Meanwhile Gazar made his way quickly in his chariot from Mount Sion across the Valley of Tyro-pheon to the Roman quarters, north of the Temple on Moriah.

After a time he halted before a Roman castle just near the fortress of Antonia.

Descending from his chariot he knocked loudly on the portal. In an instant a servant opened it.

"Is thy master, my lord Faustinus, at home?" he inquired.

"Aye," replied the servant. "Who would see him?"

"Tell him that Gazar, the Sadducee, would speak with him," answered the Jew in a tone of cultivated urbanity.

The steward bowed and disappeared within, leaving the old man at the door of the porch of the castle.

The apartment directly connected with the porch and into which the servant entered upon quitting Gazar, was a large court or room surrounded by a portico or colonnade. This was known as the outer court or atrium of a Roman home.

The floor of this court was paved with priceless marble, and in the center stood a fountain whose waters leaped playfully into the air, then descended falling musically into a large receptacle of red marble.

Round about the room were arranged articles of furniture of rare design and workmanship. There were chairs of marble inlaid with ivory and gold,

couches plated in silver and pearl over which were thrown silken covers of matchless design fringed with gold. Here and there was a table of rich oriental wood carved with exquisite care, upon which rested lamps of curiously wrought brass or gold. From the frescoed ceiling hung candelabra of great size and beauty. Artistically molded vases of porphyry, containing flowers of brilliant hues, were tastefully arranged about the court lending an air of enchantment to the scene, whilst busts and statues skilfully sculptured gazed down upon the room from niches and pedestals.

Upon this scene of wealth and luxury a soft purple glow, as of semi-twilight, fell from above where a large open square called the impluvium was revealed in the vaulted ceiling; across this opening was drawn a veil of colored canvas to keep out the rain and sun. No light entered the apartment except through this aperture, for there were no windows in the richly panelled walls. At the farther end of the room, however, opposite the porch through which the servant had entered, an arched portal gave entrance to another apartment furnished even more luxuriously than the atrium. This was the inner court, for a Roman castle of wealth boasted a number of spacious apartments of magnificence and stately grandeur.

Reclining upon one of the couches in the atrium, his eyes closed as though he slept, was a young man of not more than twenty years.

"My lord Faustinus," said the servant addressing the reclining figure, "there is a caller at the portal who would speak with thee."

Without opening his eyes or moving, the other asked crossly:

"Who is it?"

"He calleth himself Gazar, the Sadducee," replied the steward.

Faustinus opened his eyes, and propped himself up so that he could see the servant.

"By Bacchus! Gazar, the wily Jew," he said, a great disgust in his voice.

He paused a moment, then he fairly spat out the words:

"Tell the miserable dog that I shall not see him."

The Roman servant bowed and started towards the porch to deliver his master's message when the latter thinking better of the matter called out roughly:

"Hold, man."

The slave turned and came to his master's side.

"Bring the wretch to me."

The servant bowed again and departed, and Faustinus muttered to himself:

"I hate the crafty Israelite, but, maybe, I shall be obliged to have recourse to him again for a loan even as in the past; and the dirty Jew is wealthy, may the gods curse him."

Faustinus arose to adjust his sword which was hanging in the diamond-studded scabbard at his waist.

He was a man of about medium height, and possessed of much beauty of appearance. His finely molded features were of an olive tint, made even a darker hue by the Judean sun. His forehead was high and noble, bespeaking his aristocratic birth as did his finely arched nose and sparkling eyes. His carefully brushed hair and small black moustache showed him to be one who was punctilious even in the smallest things. But the lines about the mouth and the thin set lips denoted a cruelty and hardness which would give little place to pity.

A black tunic open half way down from the neck

and caught with a silver clasp revealed a corselet of bright silver gleaming beneath, fashioned from fine chain or rings. A girdle at his waist supported the scabbard and half boots of polished skin encased his legs. Beside him on the couch was thrown a red mantle which determined his rank: Faustinus was an officer of the Praetorian Guards, in fact the Tribune or Colonel of Pontius Pilate's bodyguard.

The scion of a wealthy Roman family, he had come to Jerusalem at the bidding of Caesar, and finding favor with the Governor of Judea had quickly risen to a place of importance at the Procurator's court. It was commonly acknowledged by all who knew him that Faustinus enjoyed no little influence with the Governor and was his confidant in many weighty affairs.

A noble, proud and haughty, to whom Rome was the epitome of greatness and the mistress of the world, Faustinus looked down with contempt upon all who did not share the distinction of calling the Imperial City their mother. To him the other nations of the earth were inferior peoples, fit only to serve as slaves to the descendants of Remus and Romulus. A devoted adorer of the Roman gods he could not tolerate those who worshipped a foreign deity so that the very atmosphere of Jerusalem stifled him at times, and had led him to despise the Jews with all the loathing of his proud Roman soul. Only his position constrained him to show even the smallest degree of courtesy towards the followers of Jehovah; and the High Priests and rulers of the Hebrews were but too well aware of the hatred borne towards them and their God by this influential nobleman.

To none better could Gazar have come with his message of a revolution against Rome. To none could he

look with greater hope of assistance than to Faustinus whom he felt certain would throw all his influence against any misguided Jew who would seek to thwart the power of the Empire. Jesus was a Jew. That alone was enough to condemn Him in the eyes of the Praetorian officer, but that He had preached sedition against Rome would warrant that officer's bringing Him to judgment and using his influence to have Him put to death.

The door opened, and Gazar stood within the atrium of Faustinus' castle.

Bowing low so that his garments brushed the marble pavement, rubbing his hands and smiling genially, the old Jew addressed the Roman.

"May the God of my fathers give thee and thy household peace," he said.

A picture of greater insincerity than that presented by Gazar could hardly be imagined.

Though outwardly he professed friendliness with the Romans in Jerusalem and courted their favor, at heart Gazar despised the oppressors of his country and longed for the day when Israel would be free again. Still he had made much of his wealth through loans and business transactions with the Romans, and they believed him to be not unfriendly towards their cause, and it was to his advantage to do nothing which might offend them. Hence he was obsequious in his greeting to Faustinus.

Without even acknowledging the salutation of the Sadducee, Faustinus turned one look of disgust upon his visitor.

"Well, what wouldest thou?" he said harshly. "Stand not there bowing idly. State thy business briefly and begone. A Roman officer hath other things

to occupy his time than to hold useless converse with Hebrew usurers."

He turned to his slave.

"Go saddle my charger," he snapped, "I must betake myself to the Praetorium before sundown."

The man bowed and disappeared, and Faustinus made a movement as if to leave the room.

Gazar put out his hand.

"Hold, kind sir," he said affably. "I have news which concerneth thee and the Imperial City, our mother.

The other turned fiercely upon the old man.

"What is it?" he threw at him.

"May I seat myself?" the Jew asked humbly. "I am old and I came in haste to thee with my information seeing that we are friends and knowing as I do thy great love for Rome and thy powerful influence at the court."

The officer somewhat softened by the other's words motioned to the bench, throwing himself upon a chair, the Israelite following his example.

"Proceed with thy story," said Faustinus impatiently.

"Bear with me," rejoined his visitor, "and I shall tell thee."

The Roman adjusted his sword so that it rested between his knees, then fidgeted with his dark moustache as the old man began.

"My lord," spoke Gazar, a little thrill of excitement in his voice, "thou knowest well that amongst the Israelites there is none more loyal to Rome or more favorable to her cause than I. What I shall tell thee, then, is prompted by no other motive than my love for the Imperial City and my great desire for her safety and well-being.

He paused to take a breath, and the officer grunted crossly. Pleased with himself so far Gazar went on.

"For three years past one of my nation hath gone about amongst the people preaching a doctrine which is not alone in contradiction to the tenets of the Jewish faith, but is also a direct denial of the fundamental teachings of thine own cult. We Israelites adore the God Jehovah, but we have naught to say to those who serve the Roman gods. This Man of whom I speak, however, hath heaped contempt and odium upon the deities of thine Empire."

The Roman's hand closed upon the jewelled hilt of his sword, and the large gold ring upon his finger glistened in the purple light.

"Who is this man?" he broke in fiercely.

The Jew cast a quick glance at the other, and read the effect of his words upon his listener's countenance.

"Jesus of Nazareth, who is called the Christ," he said with bitterness.

"Jesus!" blurred out Faustinus in rage. "I have heard of Him. Doth He not magician's tricks and call them miracles? And do not thy superstitious people flock after him?"

"Aye, the same," answered Gazar, encouraged by the tone in which Faustinus had spoken the name of the Christ, showing him to be already prejudiced against the Carpenter.

"So long as this man confined His teachings merely to the denial of our national religion," went on the Hebrew, "though it did cause us much pain we did not openly interfere with Him. But of late He hath become bolder in his utterances, and hath gone so far as to raise His voice against Rome our mother."

"Against Rome, the Queen of the Earth!" shouted out Faustinus in a rage.

"Aye," went on the other, watching the angry countenance of the officer. "He hath declared that Rome is a foreign nation and that the Hebrews are not obliged to serve her. He hath called her rulers tyrants and invoked imprecations upon them. He hath even denied the coin of tribute to the Emperor; and, last of all, declaring Himself to be a king He hath promised to set Himself at the head of the people; and leading them in armed revolt, to overthrow the power of the Empire, substituting for it a kingdom of which He Himself will be the monarch."

"By the great god Pan, this man must die," burst out the infuriated officer.

Pleased beyond measure with the effect which his words had had, yet careful, withal, not to show his feelings openly lest the other detect his motives, Gazar continued:

"We ourselves would have put this Man to death to show the Romans that we are not a party to His actions, but as thou knowest well, my lord, our Sanhedrin no longer hath the power of carrying the sentence of life and death. That is the prerogative of our most benignant mother, Rome."

He bowed low, and rubbing his hands, beamed genially upon the man beside him.

"He who dareth to raise his voice openly against the gods of Rome and seeketh to incite rebellion against the Empire is a traitor and must die. Where is this Man Jesus? He must be brought to justice."

Thus spoke Faustinus, angered by all that Gazar had told him of Christ.

The Sadducee realized that he must use great caution in imparting the remainder of the information he intended to give to the officer, for he did not wish the Roman to know that he himself bore any enmity

towards the Christ; and, moreover, he must enlist the man's aid without allowing him to become aware that he was being made a tool of the High Priests.

"Ah, my lord," he said, "for two weeks He hath kept Himself in hiding from us; and is, we believe, preparing secretly for the revolt which He may inaugurate during these days of our festal celebrations. Today, however, we learned that He is on His way up to the Holy City and the leaders of my people deemed it wise to take Him upon His entry into the Capital. But Jesus counteth many friends amongst the people, and we fear a popular demonstration on His behalf."

He paused again to look at the noble.

"If we could count upon the Roman soldiers to assist us in case of emergency," he hazarded, "we would not fear to seize the Christ."

"Take Him by all means," cried the officer, "I shall promise thee to supply a guard of soldiers if the occasion demand it. But let this disturber be apprehended."

"Thou are a loyal son of Rome, a noble worthy of thine ancestors. I made no mistake in coming to so ardent a defender of the Empire. I felt thou wouldest assist me in rendering service to thy country and I am not deceived."

The Jew's flattery tickled the vanity of Faustinus, and he slapped the Sadducee upon the shoulder in a friendly manner.

"Rome, Gazar, Rome is mistress of the earth," he said gaily. "If all the Hebrews were loyal like thee, there would be little reason to keep a garrison in the Holy City. I have always found thee a true friend, Gazar, and thou art respected by my countrymen, and with reason, for thou art a staunch defender of the

Eagle. Thou hast done me a favor in telling me of the treachery of this Man, Jesus. I shall relate thy story to the Governor and shall speak favorably of thee. I shall be thy friend. Call upon me for whatsoever thou needst to bring this criminal to justice."

With these words he arose, and the Sadducee followed his example, feeling that the interview was ended.

Laughing and chatting happily Faustinus conducted his guest toward the portal, and with his own hand opened it for him.

"Vale," he said, "I shall remember thy act, and Rome will find a way to repay thy loyalty."

The other raised his hands deprecatingly.

"Ah, my good friend," he whined, "no other thanks do I ask but that I serve my mistress, Rome. One small favor though I fain would have: when ere long thou hast taken thy rightful place as a commander in the Imperial City wilt thou thyself conduct me thither at my own expense, that in thy company my eyes may gaze upon the glories of the Capital of the world, and behold the ruler of the earth, his most illustrious majesty, the Emperor?"

"Loyal Gazar, good and true," said the other ardently. "I shall not forget thy request. But, thinkest thou that I shall be a commander?"

"My lord, some are fitted for high positions by mother nature herself. Pardon me, my lord, such an one art thou."

Much pleased, the officer laughed heartily and slapped the Jew good-naturedly upon the shoulder.

With a bow of great deference the old man took his leave and the Roman waved farewell to him from the door. Then he turned about and entering the atrium again, smiled so happily at the remembrance of his

visitor's compliments that the slave who had returned wondered not a little at seeing his master in such good humor.

Meanwhile Gazar speedily made his way to the house of Caiaphas, chuckling to himself over the easy conquest he had made of the proud Roman officer. His task had been much simpler than he had imagined it would be. He had cajoled Faustinus by flattering phrases and empty talk of loyalty. But one thing was certain. The capture of Jesus was now assured. Faustinus would supply a detachment of Roman soldiers in the event of a riot, and these quelling the disturbances, Rome would naturally be blamed for the taking of the Christ. He smiled broadly again as he thought of Faustinus. How the noble had fallen before his flattery! The Roman had actually believed that he, Gazar, longed to gaze upon the Emperor! He laughed out loudly at the very idea—it was so ridiculous! And what a fool Faustinus had been to give credence to it!

"Well," thought Gazar, "my friends give me credit for being diplomatic and astute. I have surely proven it this time."

Then of a sudden the smile disappeared from his face, and in its place an angry scowl passed over it as half in a murmur he said:

"Jesus, I hate Thee! I shall have the satisfaction of helping to put Thee to death."

Shortly after the departure of the Sadducee from the Roman castle, Faustinus rode forth on his big white charger, and turning the horse's steps in the direction of the Fortress of Antonia, betook himself to the Governor's Palace there to confide to Pontius Pilate, the Procurator, the news which Gazar had brought.

## CHAPTER VII

### BETHANY

PERHAPS the reader has experienced that feeling of utter helplessness which comes upon one in consequence of beholding the performance of an act of such a seemingly impossible nature that its accomplishment had hitherto been regarded as unthinkable.

If so, he will recall with what spell-bound amazement he gazed upon the phenomenon of its actuality; and, being completely overwhelmed, his very faculties paralyzed as it were by the marvellous deed, that he had been unable to express by word or act his admiration of the astonishing happening and its perpetrator. Looking back later it would seem that he had been rooted to the spot where he had been standing when the thing had occurred and with bulging eyes had merely gazed incredulously before him until aroused at length from his trance by the realization of the truth of the vision, he had burst forth spontaneously into words of praise and wonder.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead some weeks before had produced upon the townspeople of Bethany just such an effect as we have described.

So absolutely unheard of was it that one should come back from the tomb and live again, that upon witnessing the miracle of Jesus the populace had been stupefied by surprise and astonishment.

In bewilderment they had stared first at Jesus, then at Lazarus, and then back again at Jesus, scarcely crediting what they saw; and not one amongst them could utter a word or move until seeing Lazarus actually walking away towards his home, they became aware that what they beheld was not a dream but a living reality, a miracle.

Instinctively and with one accord, they had at that very instant surged forward wildly to laud the Wonder Worker, who had performed so great a deed; but to their surprise He had already passed from their midst and none could tell whither He had gone.

But for many days the town of Bethany and the countryside of Judea even to Jerusalem and far beyond its confines rang with the praises of One, who with god-like power, had quickened a corpse. And many came from afar to gaze upon Lazarus, the councillor, since they might not feast their eyes upon the Carpenter, who had resuscitated him.

Was it any wonder, then, that in consequence of so marvellous an accomplishment Jesus should become a figure of almost national importance, and that the populace should seek Him eagerly that they might bestow upon Him full measure of praise for what He had done? And is it at all surprising that on the other hand men of the stamp of Caiaphas, Gazar and their associates craving popularity and renown should envy Christ and endeavor to remove Him from the public eye so that they alone might enjoy the respect and plaudits of the multitudes?

Whilst the secret emissaries of the Chief Priest were seeking the Christ with evil intent, the worshiping crowds were as eagerly searching for Him that they might once again gaze upon the comely Figure of

One, who was, they believed, verily a prophet of the Most High God.

But their efforts had not penetrated the fastnesses of Perea, where the Son of Man prepared for the approaching Passover, for that time wherein must be fulfilled in Him all things that were spoken by prophets concerning the Saviour of the world.

At last leaving the peaceful retreat of Ephrem, where for two weeks Jesus had sojourned with His apostles, He made His way towards the Holy City choosing that road which led directly through Bethany.

Late on the Sabbath-eve, just a week before the Pasch, almost at the very hour when Gazar was conferring with Faustinus in the latter's house in Jerusalem, Christ neared the little town.

Being surprised by His unheralded approach, the townspeople could not give Him the welcome they had planned, yet they flocked in great numbers to meet Him.

Just at the spot where the highway loses itself in the Bethany streets, Lazarus accompanied by a multitude of men, women and children awaited the Master to escort Him within.

With suppressed emotions they watched Him as He neared them, walking slowly, surrounded by His apostles and making gestures as though He were teaching.

Nearer and nearer He came, a majestic Figure clothed in spotless white, clearly outlined against the background of the green fields and dusty road, flanked on either side by the roughly clad men who accompanied Him.

The crowd was restless with impatient eagerness to greet Him. But in an instant He was upon them.

Falling prostrate at the Saviour's feet, Lazarus cried out with a loud voice :

"My Lord and my Master, I adore Thee."

And the worshipping multitudes following the counsellor's example threw themselves with one accord at the feet of the Christ. But upon that assemblage which a moment before had pushed and jostled in an effort to catch a glimpse of Him whom they now adored, a reverential, awesome silence had fallen. In imitation of the crowds, the apostles likewise cast themselves upon their knees in the dusty roadway, and Jesus alone remained standing.

In a moment His gaze dwelt upon Lazarus, His friend. Then upon that sea of bowed heads He cast a look of love and yearning. Who knows, maybe at that moment He looked into the future and thought of that other day not far off now when He would stand again alone with a multitude about Him, a multitude not in adoration but clamoring for His death? And, perhaps, He secretly hoped that when He would need them so much, some of those who now knelt before Him would think of Him and befriend Him.

Slowly he raised His hands and arms towards Heaven and with His eyes fixed upon the Great Unseen, although He spoke no word aloud, His lips moved in prayer.

My poor words could ne'er describe to you the matchless beauty of the Son of God, as standing there at Bethany's gate that day He invoked the benediction of His Father in Heaven upon this host of believers.

I might perhaps picture for you the rapt expression of one who sees some heavenly vision. I might bid you call to mind the masterpieces of some artist who has immortalized upon canvas the celestial countenance of one of God's greatest saints and then tell you that these things give you but the faintest conception of the beauty of the Christ, the Son of God; for you, dear

reader, know as well as I that none born of woman can e'er be compared with the peerless perfection of the Son of Mary.

Think not, then, that I would dare to seek to portray Him to you, if in my own weak way I try to give you some vague idea of Him as He was that day so long ago.

The slanting rays of the sun coming from the west, shone upon the upturned face of Jesus and lighted His gold brown hair parted in the middle and falling profusely upon His shoulders. His deep blue eyes which had so often gazed upon the everlasting throne of God reflected the all-embracing extent of the Master's love and charity. His countenance perfectly fashioned by the hand of the Father Himself glowed with a light so dazzling in its brightness that none will ever see its equal until at last in Heaven we dwell in the presence of the Beatific Vision. The chastened skin of that Holy Face of slightly olive tint was partly covered with a beard pointed and of silky softness.

The flowing sleeves falling back from His outstretched arms revealed the delicate hands which were so soon to be pierced with cruel nails and beneath the seamless tunic of the whiteness of natural wool showed those sacred feet which had travelled so many weary miles for us and which must yet conduct Him to His death. The sandals which He wore were now covered with brown dust from the highway which He had just traversed.

His prayer finished He laid His hand lovingly upon the councillor's head, and with much tenderness in His voice and a smile upon his countenance said:

"My son, arise."

On the instant Lazarus arose and the crowds following his example pressed about the Master with

much noise and demonstrations of welcome, conducting Him within the town where a great banquet had been prepared in His honor.

Quickly the news of the arrival of the Christ spread through the town and many flocked to the gates of the home wherein the repast was laid that they might gaze upon Him. And the emissaries of the High Priests lost no time in conveying the tidings to their masters in Jerusalem.

Though hastily prepared, it was none the less an elaborate banquet which was given to the Lord that day. Tradition tells us that it took place in the house of Simon the Leper and the spot is still pointed out to pilgrims in Palestine.

At the head of the table, set with care and laden with an abundance of good things, sat Simon the host. Once an outcast from society because of the loathsome disease of leprosy which had covered him, he now enjoyed the fullness of that health which the Master had restored to him.

Just past middle age, clothed in garments of soft, costly material, he was obviously a man of wealth; whilst the choice viands upon the board proclaimed him a provident householder.

Reclining at his right hand upon the raised divan was the Christ, and at his left one who in the hearts of all mankind of every age and clime claims a special place, Mary, who thirty-three years earlier had given birth to the Saviour in the little stable at Bethlehem.

Every nation boasts its beautiful women. Each succeeding century has added its quota of fair faces to the number of those finding a place in the portrait gallery of the world's loveliest. But only Judea has given to this earth a Mary, and she was Heaven's gift to man.

When she dined with Jesus at the home of Simon

that day, scarcely fifty years of her sojourn upon this earth had run their course, and as yet the great sufferings which have made her the Queen of Sorrows, had not come into her life.

The light from the swinging candelabra (for there were no windows in the panelled walls) showed the unearthly sweetness, purity and beauty of the Mother of Christ.

Fair almost to a degree of whiteness in that section of the world where complexions are of olive hue, Mary's skin was soft and tender, whilst in her smiling blue eyes shone a maternal love for her Heavenly Son and Lord. Her soft brown hair fell loosely upon her azure mantle unadorned by any of the trinkets by which worldlings seek to enhance their beauty, for surely the Madonna needed not to regale herself with such as these. Gentleness incarnate, patience and goodness personified, truly the Mother of Jesus presented a picture such as we may hope to see only in Paradise.

Near the Lord reclined Lazarus. He was a man well advanced in years with a noble brow and commanding look. A glow of health overspread his features so that one could scarcely believe that recently he had lain in a tomb.

About that festive board were many who are now lovingly enshrined in the memory of man because of the rôles they enacted in the great drama of Calvary a few days later.

Peter was there—gruff, fiery and honest. John, the gentle, whom Jesus loved, sat near. Philip, and James, and Matthew and the others who had followed the Master took their places at the table. And so, too, did that unworthy disciple, Judas Iscariot. Swarthy of complexion, his hair and beard black, the traitor's countenance gave evidence of much character and nobleness

of heart if its possessor had but known how to turn them to right advantage.

Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus were present; so were Johanan and many others high in civic life of Bethany and Jerusalem, for Simon was a man held in great repute and amongst his friends he numbered the best.

From a shaded gallery above, musicians played as the meal progressed and the conversation was animated and pleasant.

Moving in and out about the guests, careful to administer to their smallest wants, trained servants waited deferentially upon the diners. But in attendance upon Jesus was one who occupied no menial position in that household, Martha, the sister of Lazarus.

When the repast was at its height there came to Jesus a woman, charming in appearance and dressed with grace and care, who casting herself at His feet, broke an alabaster box of very precious ointment. The sweet aroma it exhaled quickly filled the room and drew the attention of all to her action. Wonderingly the guests watched her, but as though unconscious of their inquiring glances, she proceeded to anoint the head and the feet of Jesus. Bending down upon her self-imposed task her beautiful silken tresses almost touched the floor. With a movement obviously premeditated she gathered them into her hands and with her hair wiped the holy brow and sacred feet of the Christ.

This woman of such striking personal loveliness had once been a public sinner, a profligate despised and shunned by decent society. Now she was an ardent follower of the Master. She is known to history as Mary Magdalen, the sister of Lazarus and Martha.

In the hushed silence following her action only one voice was raised.

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?"

It was the voice of Judas, and the Scriptures tell us that he said this not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief and had a bag and bore what was put therein.

Jesus raised His eyes and cast one look at the speaker.

"Let her alone," He said; "against the day of my burial hath she kept this. For the poor ye have always with you. But Me ye have not always."

The traitor spoke no words further and all eyes were again focused upon the Master who, smilingly commanding the woman, bade her arise.

Not far removed from Christ sat Johanan. As the conversation again became general the latter turned to Nicodemus beside him and said.

"Openly at last we have given evidence that we are not unfriendly towards the Carpenter. For surely our presence today at this supper table proveth it."

"Aye," said Nicodemus, "at last I have found courage to bow before Him as the Master, though I fear the outcome of my action."

"Fear not," said the patriarch, "soon He will manifest Himself and the world will flock unto Him."

"A great burden is lifted from my life," quoth Joseph, "long since had I desired to make public my belief in Him, or to find some means of acknowledging Him openly as the Christ. Today the invitation to this banquet afforded me an opportunity of showing my faith in Him."

"I fear," went on Nicodemus, "that had Simon not asked me to attend today, I should not have had courage of my own accord to acclaim myself a friend of Jesus."

"It is the will of Jehovah, our God," said Johanan reverently.

"But I fear that we shall be expelled from the Sanhedrin," whispered Nicodemus, "if Caiaphas heareth that we have been here this day."

"And should it thus transpire," asked Johanan, "would thou not be thankful for an opportunity of making some little sacrifice for Him, whom thou now believest is the prophet of the Most High?"

The other hesitated, and Johanan went on kindly:

"Must one not have the courage of one's convictions and be willing to give public demonstration of one's belief?"

"Aye," said the other humbly.

"Then why fear to sacrifice even the councillorship if in the doing thou art true to thyself and thine own convictions?"

"But it is such an honor to be a ruler," put in Joseph.

"Honor," said the seer. "Thou hast heard Jesus say once 'What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffereth the loss of his soul'?"

"Aye," said Nicodemus still unconvinced.

"Then fear not men," said Johanan, "love the Lord thy God and do His will."

Just at that moment Jesus glanced in the direction of the wavering councillors. His eye met theirs, and held them for a moment. Then He glanced away again. But in that look had been borne to their souls a courage and fortitude which made them thenceforth ardent followers and staunch defenders of Him, and of His doctrines.

The meal was almost finished. The music had ceased and the conversation had died down almost to a whisper. Johanan continued talking with his friends. Mary who had broken the alabaster box passed beside

him and recalling the Master's words he said to Joseph:

"What loving words the Christ speaketh—'The poor ye have always with you'. The Master's life hath been spent in the service of the poor and afflicted."

"Aye, much hath He done to alleviate their sufferings," said Nicodemus.

There was a momentary pause then Johanan spoke musingly:

"I have thought much of that little scene we witnessed in the Temple some days ago."

"Which scene?" inquired Joseph, as he and Nicodemus turned their glances again upon the old man.

"The blind girl who gave her precious bracelet to the beggar," the latter replied.

"'Twas strange," said Nicodemus. "She was a Roman it was clear, yet we heard her murmur that she did the act of kindness to the beggar for the sake of Jesus."

"'Twas a bracelet that she valued highly," said the old man, "for from where I stood I could see with what tenderness she fondled it before at length she had the courage to give it to the tattered figure at her feet.

"She made a sacrifice truly," said Joseph.

"Aye, and she made it for the Hebrew God, she said, in the name of Jesus, the prophet."

"Verily such an one will be rewarded by the Most High," added Nicodemus.

"Yea," said the seer, "something within me telleth me that Jesus will repay her act of kindness and bring her to a knowledge of His Heavenly doctrines."

"Thou thinkest that He will repay her though she be a pagan?" remarked Joseph again.

"Aye, surely, He will not let such an act of generosity go unrewarded. It was done in His name, and He

hath promised a recompense even for a cup of water given for Him. I am certain that one day in some fashion Jesus will reward this poor blind girl."

Now the voice of the old man was shrill, and in the comparative quiet of the room following the cessation of the music and the lull in the conversation, the words of Johanan could be distinctly heard by many of those present at the table.

From where He sat beside His host Christ also heard the words, and listened with interest to what was said.

He turned and looked at the old man who had spoken with such implicit faith in Him, and His Sacred Heart within Him was gladdened to know that He had at least one such firm disciple and loyal defender. Perhaps too within Himself He wondered regarding the blind Roman lady who had sacrificed so much for Him, a Jewish teacher, even though He were the Christ, for the Master well knew the feelings existing between the races. Possibly He was resolved one day to repay her for her faith in Him and her act of kindness towards one of His poor.

He was no doubt aware, too, that at that very instant, in the outer or servants' court a beggar dressed in tattered clothing displayed a gorgeous bracelet studded with pearls and diamonds, and in his exaggerated Oriental fashion described the beauty of the wonderful lady who had given it to him in the name of Jesus.

With much amazement the bystanders in this court listened to the strange tale told by the beggar, Enan by name, and many who believed in Jesus nodded their heads in approval at the power which He possessed which could thus influence even a pagan girl. But others there in the secret pay of the High Priests

turned looks of hatred and angry scowls upon the poor mendicant, who thus extolled the goodness of the girl and the power of the Lord.

"Thou hast stolen the trinket," said one of these latter, "and thou seekest thus to excuse thy deed by saying the jewel was given to thee by a Roman lady."

"I tell thee it was given to me," cried the beggar as the crowd pressed more closely about the man thinking they were perhaps to witness a quarrel.

"Was it ever heard," sneered the first speaker, "that a Roman aristocrat stooped to talk with a beggar and worst of all a Jew? Man thou art an outcast from thine own nation. Darest thou to assert that a wealthy lady would bestow upon such a worthless wretch as thou a bracelet of much value?"

The crowd which hitherto excited by the event of Jesus' arrival in their midst had given credence to the story told by the man, now became divided in their opinions regarding his veracity and honesty. Many became openly hostile in their remarks so that it looked for an instant as if the man might be set upon and brought to the officers of justice.

"Who was the lady that gave it to thee?" shouted a burly Jew in the assembly.

"I know not her name," answered Enan.

"Thou didst not take the trouble to inquire her name?" sneered another.

"Perhaps it was the Governor's wife," cried out a woman and her remark was followed by prolonged laughter from the multitude.

"Was it because of thy handsome appearance that she endowed thee?" jeered a maid-servant.

"She did not see me," he began to answer when a babel of voices shouted at once.

"Did not see thee. Then thou didst steal it."

"She was blind," rejoined the beggar.

"Thou didst rob a blind lady," groaned the crowd angrily.

"Nay I did not rob her," defended the man. "She gave it to me in the name of Jesus, who is called the Christ."

"Cease thy sacrilegious talk, thou prattling fool," cried menacingly he who had at first attacked the beggar's honesty. "Dare not again assert that a cursed Roman gave thee aught in the name of a prophet of Jehovah."

"Again I assert," cried out the man with vehemence, "that a Roman lady who was blind gave me the bracelet in the Court of the Gentiles in the Temple scarce two days ago."

"Seize the wretch," cried one of the mob and in the instant several lunged forward as if they would take the man by force.

"Hold, my friends," said a voice which was lifted above the din made by the assemblage, "Hold! Set the man free. He speaketh the truth."

Turning in wonder at the commanding tones of the speaker the crowd beheld before them Jesus the Master, who entering the outer court, had heard the beggar's words of protestation.

Without a word further they released their prisoner and fell in adoration at the feet of the Christ.

The former overjoyed by the turn of events smiled at the Saviour in appreciation of His intercession.

"The bracelet belongeth to this man," said the Lord. "It was given to him by a blind pagan girl. And she did it in My name."

A smile lighted the face of Jesus as He spoke the words. Then turning He quitted the place accompanied

by Simon His host, Lazarus, Mary His mother, and the others.

After He had left, the crowd rising up, dispersed, wondering much.

Johanan and the others betook themselves quickly unto their homes in preparation for the Sabbath which was on the morrow, whilst Jesus and His mother spent the night with Lazarus.

But in Jerusalem the High Priests hearing from their spies all that had transpired at the house of Simon the Leper were sorely troubled because of the growing popularity of the Christ.

## CHAPTER VIII

### FOR I AM BLIND

A H, there thou art, my daughter, happy as ever with thy lyre here in the midst of Nature's loveliness. Ah, music, music thou hast power to soothe and charm!"

It was the voice of the Lady Gratiana which spoke these words as she addressed her daughter Aureliana upon entering the latter's bower on the terrace of their castle in Jerusalem. It was morning two days after the events narrated in the previous chapter, hence the first day of the Jewish week which corresponds with Sunday in our calendar.

The Roman mother approaching her child smiled sweetly upon her, and Aureliana gladdened by the sound of her parent's voice ceased playing the lyre, and letting it hang loosely in her hands, said with much feeling:

"Ah, mother mine, how glad I am to have thee near me." And she put out one hand as if to touch her parent. "But happy didst thou say? Happy? Nay, I am not happy. I may sing and play upon my lyre, mother. I may perhaps beguile the world into thinking me light-hearted and contented. But thou knowest me too well, my mother, that I should try to deceive thee. Thou knowest that I am not happy."

The Lady Gratiana seated herself upon a low stool beside the wicker divan upon which reclined the Lady

Aureliana, and placing her jewelled hand lovingly upon her daughter's arm, said simply:

"My child."

It was the first time that the mother had ever heard the girl make the slightest complaint, and though she had known the sufferings of the child she was completely taken off her guard by the words.

"Ah, mother dear," resumed the blind girl, "to some one I must pour out my pent-up feelings, for oft-times my sufferings are more than I can bear alone. To whom could I speak who would better understand me than to thee my mother and my friend, for though I have never before said aught of this to thee I feel that thou art well aware of all that I endure."

The mother pressed the girl's hand, and the latter continued:

"My father and my friends believe me happy. But thou alone must know the truth of the dreadful misery of my life."

"Aye, my child, I have understood and have secretly pitied thee though I deemed it wiser not to speak of it to thee," said the mother kindly.

"Can I e'er be happy" went on the girl "when my eyes are closed to Nature's grandeurs when amidst the flowers and the trees I see naught but blackness —happy when the glorious sunshine is hidden from me, and night is ever present?"

The mother's eyes were moist with tears, as she sought to soothe her child.

"Ah, lament not, my daughter," she said softly, "thou wert not always blind nor shalt thou be."

"Ah, nay indeed," mused the girl "not always was I as I am today, helpless and blind. Three short years ago, short, but oh, how long to me, I too saw the glories of the earth, the brightness of the day, and

the loveliness of the stars and moon at night. My very soul was filled in contemplation of the wonders of creation."

She paused, and the Lady Gratiana pressed Aureliana's hand slightly to encourage her.

"And then," pursued the girl speaking slowly and with much anguish, "then suddenly darkness came and took from me the blessed gift of sight."

She paused again; then finishing in a pitiful wail—"Blind, blind, blind," fell back upon her divan.

For a moment the mother said nothing, too overcome with grief to utter any word.

Then scarcely knowing what she did she lifted her eyes to gaze upon the scene about her.

The bower in which the women were sitting was as we have said upon the terrace of the castle.

Roman homes were so constructed that the roof of the second story was often times surrounded by a strong low balustrade and then planted with flowers and shrubs and so made into a beautiful garden.

High above the street, shielded from the noise and dust of the highway, one could sit upon this house-top terrace and enjoy the pure air and brilliant sunshine, or wandering amidst the gorgeous flowers while the hours away.

Such a terrace had been constructed upon the castle of Donatus, the father of Aureliana, and in the very midst of this lovely garden had been erected a bower or miniature house.

A little pathway bordered by roses in full bloom led into this sanctum the walls of which inside were decorated in rosewood adorned with gold. The ceiling made of rose-colored mica permitted a flood of soft light to fall upon the room. Costly Persian rugs were strewn upon the floor, and wicker furniture reposed

enticingly upon the polished tiling. In the corner of this apartment a statue of Diana fashioned from pure white marble and before which sweet smelling incense burned, proclaimed the inmates of this abode to be adorers of the gods of Rome.

From where she sat beside her daughter the Lady Gratiana could see far out over the streets and highway below, and because the castle was at the intersection of two roads she could perceive not only Sion across the valley, and to the north of it, the Mount of Acreb, at the foot of which was Calvary, but she had also a perfect view of the Temple on Moriah and even beyond to the road leading into the Holy City over Mount Olivet.

The mother's heart went out in pity to her daughter as looking upon the loveliness of the scene she realized all that was denied to the blind girl.

Beautiful flowers of every hue were waving in the breeze. The grass was green with the freshness of spring. The sun was pouring its golden light upon the world, whilst as a background to the glories of nature rose the snowy grandeur of the Jewish Temple.

She aroused herself from her dreaming and glanced quickly at her daughter. But the latter, tranquil now after the storm of her emotions, was reclining peacefully upon her couch her eyes wide open showing the lovely brown, but sightless orbs. Her delicate hands clasped the lyre, a pale blue tunic of costly Indian silk hung gracefully about her girlish form.

Gratiana glanced upwards whispering silent prayer to the gods of Rome for her afflicted daughter and as she did so the light from the ceiling above fell upon her.

She was a typical Roman matron in her late thirties upon whose brow time had laid its hand but lightly,

for her kindly face, patrician and noble, showed little evidence of age. Her dress was of a soft violet tint, sleeveless and caught at the waist by a golden girdle. Jewellery and precious stones in abundance gleamed upon her person.

There was however a vivid contrast between her and the young girl beside her. The latter possessed an appearance of beauty almost ethereal, so fragile and unworldly it seemed. But the Lady Gratiana whilst possessing charm and grace was withal typical of the age in which she lived. Her attire was costly, yet had not the appearance of being overdone. Her jewelry was heavy, almost flashy. One might say that judging by her appearance this woman lacked an appreciation of the finer things of life, and concerned herself merely with the externals.

Her face gave evidence that she had a heart, and could feel much pity, but there was also an indefinable something which made one aware that she could be adamant if occasion arose.

We have all seen such worldlings endowed with earthly goods and treasures, who were it not for their wealth, would not be noticed by the generality of people.

Gratiana aroused herself from her reverie and glancing at her daughter said feelingly:

"Think not too much of thy trouble my child. Take heart, for just shortly since the great Mauritius, physician to Pilate's court, told thy father and me that thy blindness might pass as quickly even as it came."

"Ah, would it might, my mother," replied the girl sadly, "but other doctors wise as he have seen me, and what hope hath been forthcoming from their efforts?"

"But thou must not fall into despair," gently chided the mother.

"Ah, nay, my mother, rather do I hope, hope that once again my eyes may be opened to the light of day,—that I may look out upon the smiling beauty of the world and feast them upon the lovely gardens which my father hath constructed upon the terrace here."

"And so thou wilt, my child," answered the mother hopefully, "thy matchless beauty is marred for the moment, but thy sight will be restored. Even so, my daughter," she rejoined soothingly, "thou art pleasing to thy lover, Faustinus, now even as when in other days he gazed into thy lovely smiling eyes."

"Faustinus, mother!" exclaimed Aureliana suddenly sitting upright.

"Aye, my child. Thy lover, Faustinus, of Pilate's body-guard."

"But, mother dear, he must forget me!" cried the blind girl. "What good could come to him for having as his wife such an one as I, sightless, blind, not a helpmate but a hindrance?"

"Speak not so, Aureliana. Faustinus loveth thee, and will marry thee. Blind thou art, but beautiful; and thy blindness is but of temporary duration."

Some five years previous Faustinus upon first coming to the court at Caesarea had been dazzled by the beauty of the Lady Aureliana and quickly became her suitor. The daughter of the Roman commander, much pleased with the attentions of the brilliant Praetorian officer, had given him her heart. The Judean court had rung with the praises of the happy couple and awaited the announcement of the day when the soldier would take his loved one in marriage.

But though the young people were constantly in each other's company two years ran their course, and yet no word of their betrothal was given to still the

tongues of the gossipmongers in Caesarea and Jerusalem.

Donatus and the Lady Gratiana were much attached to Faustinus, and in their estimation none could be more worthy of their daughter's hand than he.

At length the general and the officer, then but a Centurion, had discussed the matter thoroughly, and it had been decided that when the Lady Aureliana had reached her sixteenth year she would become the bride of her lover.

All that had been three years ago. The girl had been supremely happy, and with bated breath had heard her father announce that on the morrow he would give a grand ball at the castle to proclaim publicly to the world the news of her betrothal. With a happy heart she had thrown herself upon her gilded couch to rest that night, but she had slept little, for her mind was too full of the future. Snatching fitful rest she had watched the golden dawn stealing into her chamber from the east, but when at length the sun had fully risen the girl could no longer see the light, she had been stricken suddenly blind. With hushed voice the court and the populace had spread the sad news and on the castle walls emblems of mourning had been displayed. Faustinus had been beside himself with grief, and the life of the Lady Gratiana had been despaired of. Donatus with the firmness of a Roman soldier had kept his suffering to himself, though it was noticed that he lost his wonted gaiety.

When the first shock of his grief had passed Faustinus spent long hours with the patient, Aureliana, from whose lips no word of complaint ever passed. She was as gay and happy exteriorly, at least, as though no great affliction had befallen her so that her friends and acquaintances becoming accustomed to the bright

and cheerful disposition of the girl soon forgot almost that she labored under such a terrible affliction.

The Lady Gratiana no doubt surmised the enormity of her daughter's sufferings, but it was only the Hebrew woman, Rebecca, to whom Aureliana had ever before confessed the full extent of all that she endured with so much resignation. Today for the first time her mother had heard her utter a complaint.

Courtiers at Caesarea and Jerusalem had wondered what would be the outcome of the romance, now that the girl was blind.

But Faustinus apparently did not think of Aureliana's privation as being in any way detrimental to the future he had planned. He was even more devoted than ever to his loved one. He accompanied her whenever possible. He had time for no one else but for her, and had more than once urged Donatus to permit their betrothal which had been necessarily delayed by the girl's malady. But the commander counselled patience, and Faustinus was obliged to wait.

Three years had thus gone by during which time leading doctors from Rome and Jerusalem were consulted and had visited the blind girl. But in spite of all the means known to science, the specialists could not effect a cure. Not wishing to throw Aureliana into despair they had said that her blindness might pass away even as quickly as it came, but deep down in their hearts they knew that the trouble was organic and could not be remedied by any methods they might employ.

Meantime Faustinus, impatient with the delay, had begged Donatus again and again to let him take the girl in marriage.

"Faustinus is impatient, my child, with waiting and

is anxious to marry thee at once, so thy father telleth me," said the Lady Gratiana.

"Aye, we have waited long," mused the girl. "It is over three years now since that fatal day when our betrothal would have been announced, the day on which, instead of being made happy, I was made miserable through losing the precious gift of sight."

"But I think that thy father will now consent," went on the mother.

"Oh, but, mother dear, I must not marry Faustinus," cried the girl.

"What art thou saying, child?"

"Oh, canst thou not understand? I love Faustinus with all my heart. But I am blind; he must forget me."

"My daughter, thou art overwrought. Thy lover knoweth well that thou art blind, but surely during these three years he hath given proof of his love for thee."

"He loveth me not more than I love him."

"Then, my child, if he chooseth to ask thy hand in marriage, surely, he knoweth full well what he doth."

"Oh, I know, my mother. But I feel within me that it is not fair to him that he should marry me. Maybe he feeleth that in honor or in pity for me that he should not leave me now when I am thus afflicted since he had asked my hand before my blindness came. Oh, mother mine, I love him and want to make him happy, but I cannot feel I am doing so in letting him take for his bride one who is blind and helpless."

"But, my dear, surely Faustinus is the better judge. Thou knowest he hath importuned thy father many times these three years past."

"Ah, it is well now, mother, when he is an officer in Judea. But when at last he assumeth his rightful

station at Caesar's court amidst the mighty ones of the earth, will it not be a reproach to him to have as his wife a woman who cannot take her place beside him at the glorious functions of the capital? Will he then be happy?"

"Aureliana, my considerate child," said the mother graciously, "thinkest thou that Faustinus hath not thought upon these things as well as thou?"

"But he is young and rash, and often doth things hastily which in saner moments he regretteth. Oh, I love him so, that it would kill me to think that he should ever be, even in the smallest degree, unhappy."

"He is older than thou," laughingly rebuked the older woman.

"Ah, by two years," said the other, "but I am older with the wisdom of the blind, which cometh from sitting daily wrapped in thought."

The girl's words stung Gratiana as she thought of the long, lonely hours which her daughter must have spent a prisoner in the garden bower, for in spite of all the efforts of the household, time must necessarily hang heavy for the blind girl.

But she must not let her daughter detect her own feelings. She must be cheerful before her at least. So with much jollity in her voice she said gaily:

"My darling, I have a secret for thee."

"A secret, mother?" exclaimed the other. "What is it?"

"Guess, my dear."

Aureliana paused a moment; her pretty little mouth was pursed, and her noble brow knit as she pretended to think. Her mother watched with interest. Then a sunny smile broke over the girl's face.

"But, mother dear, I just can't imagine," she laughed. "Tell me quickly; I am anxious."

"It hath been agreed at last between thy father and thy lover. Faustinus will take thee in marriage."

"Mother!" cried the girl in unmistakable accents of joy.

"Aye, my child," went on her mother, "thy lover is impatient and would wait no longer, so thy father hath consented."

A silence fell for a moment between the two; then the daughter whispered in girlish sweetness:

"I am so happy that at last it is decided. Oh, what hours of torture I have endured alone, thinking of what the future might hold. I love Faustinus so much, and could not bear to think of being separated from him forever. Oh, I shall try so hard to make him happy; to be as if I were not blind."

"And thou wilt succeed," whispered Gratiana arising and kissing Aureliana affectionately.

"Faustinus, my own!" mused the girl aloud.

"Thy father will no doubt give a ball in thy honor, my child, and announce thy betrothal as he had intended three years ago."

"And at last the world will know that I shall be his wife," rejoined the daughter. "It seemeth almost too good to be really true."

"Thou wilt have the patience to wait?" asked the mother, kindly standing over her daughter.

"To wait?" said the girl inquiringly.

"Aye, there may be some small delay further."

"Delay!" exclaimed Aureliana breathlessly.

"Thy father and Faustinus conferred with Pontius Pilate regarding the marriage. The Governor was pleased but explained that it must be deferred for some little time."

"But why, mother?" asked the girl with much disappointment in her voice.

"Only to thee and few others in Jerusalem is it known that Pontius Pilate is the guardian of Faustinus, appointed by the latter's father ere he died in Rome a year ago. It would appear that because of some legal transaction in which thy lover is much concerned the Governor deemeth it advisable that two years more should elapse before the wedding will take place."

"Two years!"

"Aye, my child."

"Mother dear, that is long. Have we not waited enough?"

"But the Procurator's orders must be obeyed. Although Faustinus too is much annoyed. It was just last evening that he heard the news from Pilate himself."

"Ah, well," said the girl resignedly "after all, what are two years if at their termination I shall be happy with my lover?"

Silence fell then between the two, and leaning far back upon her couch Aureliana looked content and peaceful. The soft light showed the slightest sign of a smile upon her features, occasioned no doubt by happy thoughts which at that moment occupied her mind. Her mother standing beside the divan gazed for a moment upon the girl, and she too was thinking of what the future would mean for her beautiful child.

Hastily turning away Gratiana said in a voice husky with emotion:

"I must away my child, for the morning is now well spent. I shall summon thy slaves to thee that they may keep thee company. They shall dance before the goddess Diana here whilst I burn incense at her shrine. And thou shalt join thy voice with mine in intercession to our patroness that she may cure thee and bring thee much happiness in thy new life with Faustinus."

Saying these words she touched a little bell on a marble stand nearby, and its silvery tinkle rang out clearly.

"What can it serve us, mother dear?" asked Aureliana softly "to bow before the graven images of the goddess there? Can a mold of stone do aught to banish from my eyes the blindness which doth close them?"

The older woman glanced sharply at her daughter. Then speaking in an undertone lest her voice be heard by the Roman servants who might be approaching in answer to her summons, she said:

"Speak not so, Aureliana, for shouldst another hear thy words it might seem that thou dost doubt the mighty deities of our Mother Rome."

"Ah, mother mine, I sometimes do," came the voice of the girl. "For in these years of darkness sitting here alone in thought I have pondered much and often, and strange fancies come into my troubled mind."

"What fancies, child?" impatiently inquired the mother.

A look such as that of one who sees some heavenly vision or is lost in ecstasy came over the countenance of the blind girl. Raising herself to a half-sitting posture and extending her hands as if she would draw her mother near to her, she began in a voice of much tenseness.

"Oh, my mother, whom I love so much. I wonder wilt thou understand when I tell thee that——"

"Ah, here come thy Roman women," broke in the Lady Gratiana as at that moment appeared at the door of the bower two graceful and charming creatures dressed in immaculate white without adornment of any kind.

"Enter," she continued beckoning to them to approach.

They entered and came towards the wicker divan.

"We have summoned you to dance before the goddess whilst we invoke her assistance," spoke the Roman matron.

At the words, Aureliana sank back again upon her cushions but the look of ecstasy had faded from her face, and in its place there was one of sadness.

The Lady Gratiana crossed to the altar erected before the idol and placing incense upon the ever burning fire gave the signal to the virgins to begin their dance.

"Join thy prayer with mine to Diana," said she to her daughter.

With artistic charm and grace the dancers paid homage to the pagan image whilst the mother spoke aloud its praises. The lips of the girl moved also, but her prayer was not to Diana. It was to Jehovah the Hebrew God, and offered through the intercession of Jesus, the Carpenter.

The invocation finished, the mother withdrew leaving Aureliana alone with the two slaves.

"What wouldst thou of us, my lady?" inquired one of them deferentially.

"I think I shall walk the while," answered the blind girl, "and though my sightless eyes may not behold the beauty of these gardens fair, yet still in fancy I shall see them as when in other days I bent upon the flowers blossoming in the well-kept plots."

"Whither wouldst thou go, my lady," continued the servant, "upon the terrace, or rather by the path shaded with the ilex trees out beyond the lake?"

Saying these words the two women helped their mistress to arise.

"Ah, towards the lake, I think," she answered. "For

from its placid waters to my soul some spark of its tranquillity and peace may come."

With a little feminine gesture common in every age she arranged her person and then said sweetly:

"I am ready. I shall follow where ye will lead me."

It was surely a pitiable sight to see this daughter of a wealthy father making her way slowly between the two guides one on either side. The greatness and glory of the Creator reflected in the dazzling beauty of the flowers upon the terrace, the brilliancy of the noonday sun, and the magnificence of the city below were marred by the fact that this fairest creature of them all, this beautiful girl was denied the gift of sight.

Quitting the bower, the trio made its way slowly along the terrace to where a marble staircase led below and towards the lake situated in the gardens at the rear of the house.

"We are at the stairway now," said one of the slaves as she directed her mistress' steps to it.

"Thank thee," said Aureliana kindly as she placed one foot upon the landing. But in the very act she paused, for upon the breeze was wafted to them the sound of cheering and singing.

The servants turned their heads towards the east whence the noise had come.

"What sounds are these?" asked the blind girl.

The woman who had shortly before addressed Aureliana advanced a few paces towards the eastern balustrade of the terrace, and looked out over the surrounding country towards the Mount of Olivet. Then returning to her mistress' side she narrated what she had seen.

"O'er Olivet, my lady, a great procession fileth; a multitude of men, women and children are coming

from Bethany, it would seem. They're singing as they march."

Aloud Aureliana said nothing, and in a moment descended the stairs with her maids but within herself she murmured:

"Jesus, could it be that thou hast manifested Thyself, at last, unto the people?"

And the slaves noticed that morning that their mistress who was usually so bright and happy was strangely quiet and said little, although her lips moved as though she communed with an unseen personage.

## CHAPTER IX

### BEHOLD THY KING COMETH

**A**T a juncture of two streets in the lower portion of the Holy City stood a house of goodly proportions, built of stone laid in large blocks, undressed on the outer side, in fact presenting the same appearance as when they were hewn from the quarry.

Facing north and east the dwelling was in a part of the city which was much congested at times with the numbers of people who thronged through the narrow lanes.

The uninviting exterior of this building was relieved only by two balconies; one constructed on the easterly and the other on the northerly side of its façade at the height of the second story. On to these balconies opened two large casements, similar to modern French windows, affording a view of the city to the north and of Olivet to the east.

Within the chamber from which these windows opened, a little group of some dozen or more men were assembled on the first Palm Sunday. From their anxious faces, their restless gestures and their conversation carried on in subdued voices, one could easily perceive that some matter of great moment disturbed them.

The sunlight pouring into the room from the east (for it was but early morning) lighted the richly deco-

rated apartment furnished with costly divans bespeaking the wealth of the owner.

Two or three of the occupants of the chamber were reclining upon couches, but the greater part of the assembly paced nervously up and down the floor talking excitedly.

"Glance out now, Asahel," spoke one of the men sharply, stopping abruptly in his walking as he did so. His voice, his appearance, his commanding tones told at once that he was Caiaphas.

Obeying the command Asahel, a Pharisee, hurried out upon the balcony and peered into the streets below.

His gaze fell upon great numbers of men, women, and children all hurrying in the same direction—towards Olivet to the east.

A scowl crossed his brow as he turned and re-entered the chamber.

"The crowds are flocking towards the Mount in ever increasing numbers," he announced in a tone of much bitterness.

The intelligence was received with muttered exclamations of anger by the others of the party, and silence fell upon them. Caiaphas and some few of his associates continued pacing gloomily up and down the room.

In the midst of one of these ambulations, the High Priest stopped shortly and wheeling about said fiercely:

"Men, something must be done at once. This Jesus must be taken before our reputation and prestige are finally ruined."

Murmurs of approval followed upon his words.

"See," he shouted pointing towards the windows, "see the populace, hearing that He is at Bethany, are flocking out to greet Him and we are powerless to stop them."

Gazar, the Sadducee, who was also present in the group raised his voice,

"He will be taken," he said with much assurance.

"Taken," stormed the other, "but, man, the whole city will be at His feet before He is delivered up. We must put Him to death, but it must be done before He hath worked more harm, else Rome will punish us."

"My lord," began Gazar "there is——"

But on the instant there were borne to the ears of the group of anxious men the sounds of cheering and singing and the joyful shouts of a great multitude, the same cries of joyful acclaim which floated on the breeze to the beautiful Aureliana high up in her castle home.

Caiaphas raised his hand for silence, and the order being obeyed, his followers turned their glance towards the east whence the sounds came.

Louder and louder came the cheering.

"Go, see what is transpiring," shouted the Pontiff.

One of the body hastened to the eastern balcony and returned in an instant breathless with information.

"Down the slopes of Olivet" he cried in excitement "a great procession is coming towards the city. The crowd is immense and numbers are flocking from the city to meet it and swell its ranks. The singing and the shouting can be clearly heard."

"Thanks," returned the High Priest sarcastically. "Thinkest thou that we have not ears with which to hear? I sent thee to tell us what thou mightest see, not to record what thou didst hear."

The man completely crushed by his superior, blushed scarlet and dropping his eyes to the floor, said nothing further.

The face of the Pontiff was livid with rage at the news of the procession which could be nothing else but the advance of Jesus Christ into the Holy City.

So the worst had happened, he thought within himself. Jesus had deliberately defied them all, and was entering the city as a king. He would laugh at the power of Rome and the authority of the High Priests and draw the people unto Himself as if he were possessed of royalty. Caiaphas' very body shook with anger at the insolence of this Man who dared to oppose him.

Then, coward that he was, because he could not lay violent hands upon the Christ and crush Him as he would have liked to do, he vented his feelings upon those who stood about him.

"Ye miserable weaklings," he bellowed "will ye let this prattling rabbi, this Galilean Woodworker, come into our midst and take from us the respect and obedience which we have so long enjoyed from the people? Will ye let Him draw the world away from us and even perhaps despoil us of our wealth? Will ye stand idly gaping there whilst He cometh into the city as a king laughing at our powerlessness to stop Him?"

Now, some of those who were present, although loyal members of the radical element of the Sanhedrin, were not over friendly towards Caiaphas, whose domineering manner and haughty attitude repelled them. These took offence at the words which he now spoke in such an imperious manner.

"It would have served thee better if thou thyself hadst made provision to have him apprehended during these past three years," said one of these latter in answer to the Pontiff's cutting words. "Thou art the High Priest. Wouldst thou have thy minions do thy duty? And yet perhaps 'tis not unnatural," he continued, "seeing that thou art but a minion and a servant thyself."

The sarcasm of the last few words bit into the

very soul of Caiaphas for they contained not a little truth. He was indeed merely a servant and a minion. A servant of Rome from whom he held his commission, a servant, too, of Annas his father-in-law, the rightful High Priest whose place he had usurped.

Stung by the taunt he turned upon the speaker, Shemaiah, a wealthy Sadducee of fine physique and stately bearing, and in bitterest accents spat at him:

"Servant I may be in some respects. But what I possess I have acquired by honest effort. Some there are whose wealth hath come through stealing." He paused. "Knowest thou of such, Shemaiah?" he asked pointedly.

Now Shemaiah had become rich rather suddenly, and although it was commonly rumored in Jerusalem that he had amassed his wealth through shady practices, no one before had ever dared openly to hint that he had stolen. The words of the High Priest then shocked the others, and angered the accused man, so that he made a motion as if he would strike the speaker.

Gazar seeing that an ugly situation was developing and that if things continued, Christ might enter the city without their knowledge, came to the rescue.

"My friends," he said smoothly, "there is nothing to be gained by indulging in personalities. Our chief concern is with Jesus. We all are loyal citizens and wish to see our Temple and our city kept undefiled. Not to one more than to another doth it fall to apprehend the Christ; it is the common duty of all."

Caiaphas glanced quickly at the speaker and the latter gave him a knowing smile. The High Priest taking the hint that he had been hasty in his remarks flushed at the remembrance of the words he had used.

"It were not well——" began Shemaiah bitterly, but Gazar interrupted politely.

"There is little time to discuss the situation, gentlemen; we must act at once so that the criminal, Jesus, may be taken before He hath done more harm to our cause."

At this point Elishama, another of those present in the chamber, raised his voice.

"Would it not be well to——" he began.

But he got no further for at that moment the noise and clamor of the shouting and singing of the approaching multitudes outside increased to such a degree that the very words they uttered were now clearly intelligible.

"Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed be the King of Israel who cometh in the name of the Lord!"

The words echoed and re-echoed within the room where the listeners, too dumbfounded to speak, regarded each other, their faces blanched with fear.

Again and again came the sounds of the cheering and the singing.

Now it was a chorus of children's voices which chanted the refrain.

"Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed be the Kingdom of our Father, David,  
Which is come. Hosanna in the Highest."

Asahel, no longer able to contain himself, shouted out enragedly:

"Even the children have gone after Him."

The remark aroused the other occupants of the room from the stupor into which they had been seemingly thrown by the first sounds coming from without. Several of the Pharisees and Sadducees muttered in suppressed

rage, as louder and louder roared that mighty host in the street below.

In spite of themselves these enemies of Christ were forced to listen.

The women's voices were singing in chorus a great refrain of welcome. Now the men thundered out repeated Hosannas in sonorous accents, only to be followed again by the sweet full tones of the little ones. Then together the immense procession would chant in unison.

"Hosanna to the Son of David, our Lord and King."

Caiaphas, his face livid with passion, took his station at the window to glance into the street.

"Be wary, my lord," counselled Gazar, "for in the state of frenzied excitement in which the people are now there is danger that should they see thee, they might do thee harm."

The High Priest scowled angrily, and spoke sharply to the old Sadducee:

"I am not a child nor do I need thy suggestions to guide my conduct."

Gazar made no reply, but he smiled secretly to himself as he noticed that the man withdrew a little within the casement so that he might see, yet not be seen by the crowds in the highway.

The others gathered about him and peered out upon the procession.

Such a scene as met their gaze this world has never beheld since or before that fateful day.

A vast concourse of people filled the narrow street below and extended back to where the slopes of Olivet rose against the blue sky. A seething mass of human beings was pushing onwards towards the Temple in front, and whilst there were manifold evidences of the joy and exultation of the marching multitude, there

was however an appearance of order and unity so that the mighty crowd could not be termed a mob.

Towards this approaching procession filed another multitude coming from the Holy City and this latter meeting the contingent from Bethany turned about in its tracks so that it faced towards Jerusalem, thus helping to swell the ranks of the great demonstration. Back from the direction whence the march had begun hundreds were still pouring down the incline of Olivet striving to obtain a place with those pressing ever onwards in the hope of coming at least a little nearer to the central Figure of the vast assemblage.

The bright Judean sun pouring down lighted a scene which could be duplicated in no quarter of the globe save in the Orient.

Flowing robes of every shade, head-dresses of varied hues and shapes, cloaks of costly silks and cheapest wool, pilgrim's garb and princely mantle were mingled indiscriminately in the riot of color which that panorama presented.

But in the very midst of that picture raised above the others who marched along was He in whose honor this great demonstration was being held—Jesus the Carpenter from Nazareth, the Son of David.

Mounted upon an ass, Christ serene amidst the shoutings of the populace looked neither to right nor left, but with His eyes fixed upon the Temple rising in all its grandeur before Him, prayed as He was borne along towards the city, which He was entering to die for the redemption of the world.

Coming through the shady groves and verdant gardens of Olivet many had stripped the fig and olive trees of their leafy boughs, and with these they had strewn the way over which Jesus must pass. Others carried branches high above their heads making an

arch through which the Master might ride, whilst yet others waved them excitedly in the breeze. Those coming from Jerusalem vying with the marchers from Bethany, and not wishing to be outdone in welcoming the Christ, stripped off their colored cloaks and threw them under the feet of the ass, whilst the little children paved the road with flowers.

We can well understand the frenzied joy of the people. Their hopes as we have said were centered in the Saviour whom they confidently believed would be a king. Jesus had shown Himself to be a Wonder Worker with power over life and death and now today He had consented to enter their city as a monarch. Surely there could be no doubt that at last the Scriptures would be fulfilled and the Nation would be delivered, for had not Zachary spoken in prophecy regarding Him?

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion, shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King will come to thee, the just and saviour: he is poor, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”

So again and again they sang “Hosanna, Hosanna to the Son of David, our Lord and King,” for their hearts were lighted and happy since at last the great Messiah had come. As they marched along they saw in fancy this Man, Jesus, clothed in purple and gold leading forth a great army to crush the Romans, thus restoring Israel to her rightful heritage amongst the nations of the earth. They saw themselves possessed of wealth and riches, their country a land flowing with milk and honey, and in the Capital a great gold throne inlaid with pearl and ivory whereon would sit the Christ, the King of the world. The apostles too joining in this common expectation, glanced with pride upon the Master imagining that they would be chosen as His chief

executives in the new kingdom, and Peter who was near Jesus cried out in enthusiasm:

"Lord, it is good."

But to his amazement the Master was weeping. The apostle scarcely crediting what he saw looked with wonder upon the Christ, not understanding why the latter should be in tears in the midst of such acclamations of welcome. A feeling that they were tears of joy quieted the old man but this momentary reassurance was quickly dispelled, when after an instant he heard Jesus speaking softly and mournfully.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, if thou hadst known and that in this thy day the things that art to thy peace. But now they are hidden from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee and thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee and compass thee round and straiten thee on every side and beat thee flat to the ground and thy children who are in thee. And they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation."

Peter was on the point of asking the Master what His words meant when the swelling chorus of voices burst forth anew into the glorious chant, "Hosanna, Hosanna," and drowned his voice.

The enemies of the Christ watching at the window were beside themselves with rage at the sight of this wonderful procession.

"The cursed Nazarene," hissed Caiaphas. Others, too, heaped imprecations upon the head of the Saviour, when suddenly Gazar touching the High Priest's arm shouted excitedly:

"See, Johanan is in the concourse," and he pointed as he spoke.

The High Priest looking in the direction indicated exclaimed bitterly:

"Aye, and Joseph and Nicodemus are with him."

Yes, sure enough, in all the sweltering heat of the day, crushed and jostled as he needs must be in the midst of such a throng, the old man, Johanan, now ninety years of age, trudged along in spite of his infirmity, that he too might add his homage to the Christ on this triumphal day.

Now the old patriarch was almost an invalid who could walk only with the greatest difficulty, and then only with the aid given to him by friends. We can well imagine, then, how every step he took that day must have caused him intense suffering, even though he was so willingly helped by Joseph and Nicodemus.

No word of complaint escaped the seer, as he dragged himself along. His face wore an eager look. His eyes shone brightly and by the movements of his lips one could easily perceive that his shrill voice was raised in song with the others.

Joseph and Nicodemus shouted too, but they did not seem at ease in the procession, judging by the furtive glances they cast about them.

"Well, the Carpenter hath outwitted us," quoth Shemaiah with much irony in his voice, "yet we are the learned rulers, the exalted priests and chiefs of the nation to whom nothing is impossible."

He laughed loudly as he proceeded mockingly:

"The Nazarene deserveth His victory, for having beaten such a goodly band as we."

Caiaphas turned fiercely upon the speaker and would have made some fitting rejoinder had not Gazar sensing trouble interposed sardonically:

"Aye 'tis most romantic—a Carpenter turned king!"

At which all laughed and another crisis was averted.

Aside, the old Sadducee whispered to his kinsman, and in the din occasioned by the procession outside,

their conversation was not overheard by the others present.

"Hold thy peace, man, and be not hasty," he cautioned, "or thou shalt make an enemy of Shemaiah."

"But he provoketh me," broke in the Priest.

"Aye" rejoined the other "but—"

"And I hate him," hissed Caiaphas with venom.

"I hate him no less than thou," continued Gazar, "But man, 'tis not good policy to incur his wrath by showing thy feelings openly. Be patient, and do not lose thy temper. Of all our members he is, perhaps, the most influential and wealthy. For that reason we must humor him. Already we have lost not a few of our supporters who have gone to the side of Jesus. Wouldst thou drive Shemaiah to take a place beside Johanan in the procession in the street below?"

"Have no fear. He would not do such a thing," said the High Priest, somewhat subdued.

"Be not too sure," put in the other, "for if we anger him he might in revenge throw his resources to strengthen Jesus."

"Then let him do so," cried the Pontiff truculently, "we are better without such an one."

Gazar momentarily lost patience with this obstinate relative.

"Wilt thou never learn good sense," he snapped. "Treat him with toleration until the Carpenter be put to death. Then we shall trump up some excuse to dismiss this robber from the Sanhedrin."

Caiaphas forced a laugh as he replied to the old hypocrite.

"Thou art a wise man, Gazar. I shall follow thy advice."

Gazar smiled but said nothing further, for at that

moment rang out again and again in the street the jubilant cry,

"All hail to Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, all hail to Jesus, our Lord and King."

Several of the baffled listeners in the room exclaimed:

"Perceive ye how we prevail nothing? For the whole world is gone after Him."

"Rome will surely crush us, for this Man is inciting the populace to revolution," said a Pharisee.

"Aye, He hath proclaimed Himself a king," chimed in several others.

"We must force Him to desist from this calamitous course which He is pursuing," cried Caiaphas.

He turned to Gazar.

"Go thou into the street and seek to dissuade Him. It will not be dangerous for thee to mingle with the mob for thou art known and respected by the people."

The Sadducee pleased with the flattering compliment smiled.

"I shall go" he added genially "and perhaps I may impress my dear friend, Jesus, to forego this demonstration."

A tone of sarcasm crept into his voice as he said these last words and an evil glint glowed in his eyes.

Before the others realized it he was gone, and his colleagues left behind waited until they saw him emerge from the house and enter the ranks of the marchers.

They could easily distinguish him by the costly purple and gold costume which he wore, and they smiled when they saw the people make way for him as he elbowed forward.

To the very side of the Master he forced his way, and although they could not know what he said to the

Christ, the watchers at the window could perceive that Gazar spoke with Him.

In reality the Sadducee approaching the Messiah had said:

"Good Master, with joy I see the people proclaiming thy praise, for Thou hast done much good and we revere Thee."

Just then the voices of the children sang out sweetly:

"Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest."

The sounds angered Gazar though he did not show his feelings. Instead he said deferentially:

"But dost Thou not fear that the people go too far? Hear what they say."

Jesus cast one glance at the speaker and the latter wincing under the look dropped his eyes in confusion.

Then Christ said, not unkindly:

"Yea, I hear. I say to thee if these shall hold their peace the very stones will cry out. Hast thou never heard the words that David spoke in prophecy concerning the Son of Man?—'Out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise'?"

Completely crushed by the Saviour's words Gazar made no reply and in a moment was thrust from the Master's side by the press of the throng.

He turned about to re-enter the house which he had but lately quitted and in doing so collided with the patriarch—Johanan.

"Hail, Gazar!" cried the latter. "It cheereth me to see thee in the train of the Master's followers. Rejoice, rejoice my friend for the Messiah hath at length come to Israel——"

But the Sadducee had not waited for the old man to finish. With a gesture of contempt and an angry

expletive he had betaken himself away from the spot. And Johanan at a loss to explain the ruler's action shook his head, and in the joy of following the Lord forgot the incident at once.

By the time that Gazar again reached the dwelling at the corner Jesus had already passed well along the street so that the watchers at the windows could see Him in the distance only. And when their fellow-councillor returned with his story they savagely cursed Christ and dispersed determined to lay new plans for His capture.

Meanwhile the great procession slowly made its way towards the Temple up the slopes of Mount Moriah.

At a strategic point on the road in the quarter of Ophel through which the marchers must pass a division of Roman soldiers—cavalry and infantry—was drawn up in military formation.

The silver armor of the men, their burnished shields and shining spears gleaming in the brilliant sunshine showed the detachment to be prepared for any emergency or riot which the Jewish demonstration might occasion.

At the head of this martial phalanx seated upon a white steed decked with embroidered hangings was a stately Roman officer whose corselet of silver and gold together with the flowing scarlet mantle proclaimed him a general. Upon his head he wore a golden helmet from which waved a plume of scarlet cock's feathers. Boots of polished red leather encased his feet and legs whilst from his girdle hung a silver scabbard. About his neck was suspended a chain of gold.

He was a handsome man, powerfully built, scarcely forty years of age, and his face bearing the marks of nobility and kindliness told of one who whilst he

commanded yet appreciated the feelings of those who obey.

Such was Donatus, Commander of the Roman Army in the Holy City, father of the blind girl, Aureliana.

Mounted upon fiery chargers about him were Faustinus and many other nobles connected with the Praetorian Guards. But Donatus paid no heed to them. His eyes were fixed upon the Christ, riding majestically in the midst of the cheering multitudes.

Truly, it was the might of earthly greatness arrayed with all the emblems by which men denote strength which gazed that day upon the unostentatious power of the Son of God.

A smile of ridicule and derision crossed the countenance of Faustinus, but Donatus was much impressed with all he beheld, and most of all with Jesus.

Long and thoughtfully the Roman general gazed upon that holy face of the Master, for it was the first time he had ever seen the Christ, and it burned itself in such a manner upon his very soul that he could never efface it from memory.

The soldiers were restless. They had been sent here to maintain order, and had been assured by Faustinus that there would be a riot when they would have an opportunity of dyeing their swords with Hebrew blood. But, apparently, this Man seated on the back of an ass was no revolutionist. This crowd which accompanied Him bore no arms other than olive branches and was not in an ugly mood but rather rejoiced.

The Israelites passed on, and the Roman soldiers fell in beside them to insure peace. But their services were not required.

Christ was not a rebel. If there had been ever a moment in His life when He could have worked the people up to such a frenzy that they would have suc-

ceeded in throwing off the Roman yoke, surely it was on this first Palm Sunday when they rallied about Him in such numbers and would have obeyed His voice in no matter what He had commanded. But although He entered as a king in royal state He sought by no word or sign to stir the people up against Rome. And seeing this, the priests and His enemies secretly cursed Him.

At length He came to the Temple. There the great procession dispersed, for the pilgrims could not approach the Sanctuary in travelling attire and covered with dust.

And whilst the Roman cohort returned to its quarters and the multitudes made their way slowly to their homes talking freely and excitedly of the day's events, Jesus entered the Temple alone to pray.

## CHAPTER X

### HIS FACE DID SHINE LIKE THAT OF ONE DIVINE

SOME hours after Aureliana with her Roman ladies had quitted the terrace-bower, the Lady Gratiana entered the apartment only to find it empty and deserted.

"Ah, thus alone," she mused aloud. "My daughter doubtless walketh in yonder garden with her maids."

Dreamily the Roman matron wandered about the chamber before casting herself upon the wicker divan, where shortly before the blind girl had reclined whilst confiding to her mother the heartaches she so resolutely endured.

Over and over again Gratiana thought of the heroic love which the patient sufferer bore for Faustinus, a love so pure and self-sacrificing, that she was willing to see him marry another rather than be the cause of the slightest inconvenience or hindrance to him in his life work or his station.

"Ah, surely that is affection deep and all enduring," murmured the woman on the divan. "How fortunate indeed is Faustinus that he will have as his soul's companion such an one as she. Sightless she may be; but, oh, how truly noble! Her vision doth not confine itself to that which the eyes perceive. It goeth beyond and gazeth upon the finer things which constitute true happiness and peace. Would that I possessed a char-

acter like unto my daughter's! My outlook is dwarfed by the superficialities which surround me, and hide from me the sweeter elements of life. Truly my child is blind but though I have the gift of sight am I not after all more blind than she?"

She caught herself at this point and laughed softly as she continued:

"I am becoming philosophical. My favorite master would surely smile were he to hear my ravings. But I must find Aureliana."

She arose to leave the place, but at that moment her gaze fell upon the lyre resting upon the floor where her child had left it.

The mother taking it up fondled its artistically molded body.

If that little musical instrument only could have spoken and told this Roman matron the tales it had heard from her daughter, surely the former would have learned much which would have surprised her. If those strings could have told of the sobs to which they had often vibrated when the lonely girl writhed in the agonies which pain brought to her, of which she spoke to no living soul, O, what a story of silent endurance the mother would have heard! If that lyre could have talked it could have repeated a story of daily martyrdom borne gallantly and smilingly without a murmur. It would have told that the happy smile, the cheerful tone, the bright, vivacious disposition which Aureliana always possessed were but the affected gaiety of a heroine concealing her feelings that she might not pain others.

But unfortunately, the pretty little instrument could not speak and so the mother must remain in ignorance of her daughter's real nobility of character, for never from the lips of that patient sufferer would a word

escape by which she might draw praise or pity to herself.

Gratiana gazed long upon the object in her hands.

It was only an ordinary lyre like so many others of its kind then in use amongst the Romans and the Greeks. But what happiness it must have brought to the blind girl when sitting alone in her terraced prison she picked its slender strings and made sweet music which spoke to her very soul! How many hours it must have helped to while away! How many heart-aches it must have helped to soothe! Just a little contrivance made of wood and strings it was indeed, but it spoke a language which in all ages and climes has calmed the troubled spirits of the weary and oppressed and cheered the lonely. For like all other musical instruments that lyre had a soul which throbbed with the pulse of sweet sounding chords and symphonies breathing the life of that very abode whence all music is born—Heaven wherein there are no jarring or discordant notes but where all is perfectly attuned with the very center and source of all harmony which is God Himself.

Music speaks to the soul of man as nothing else can do. It has power to subdue the fiercest passions and conquer the strongest wills. It charms the great and small, the rich and poor alike; aye, it even casts a spell upon the animal kingdom, for music is the voice of the Creator and at its sweet sounds the soul vibrates.

At length Gratiana replaced the instrument, but before doing so she raised it to her lips, kissing tenderly the strings and the wood which her daughter's hands must have so often caressed. Then she turned and slowly left the room.

Along the little path bordered by rose bushes she walked but she stopped suddenly as upon the still morn-

ing air were borne to her ears the shouting and cheering as of a great multitude.

She crossed to the balustrade and gazed out even as had the Roman servant some hours before and the same scene met her gaze—a countless army of human beings filing in procession. But this time that vast concourse was almost at the Temple yonder.

"What can be the meaning of this great demonstration?" she asked herself aloud. "'Tis not the Jewish Sabbath, for that they celebrated yesterday."

Louder and louder came the cheering of the crowds ascending the Mount. She could hear the singing clearly now.

"Hosanna to the Son of David,  
All hail to Jesus our Lord and King,  
Hosanna in the highest!"

"What can this celebration mean?" she cried aloud a second time. "'Tis not the Feast of the Passover which the Hebrews observe for Donatus hath told me that is yet some days off."

"All praise to the Wonder Worker!" roared the mighty concourse at the Temple gates.

"Lift up thy gates and sing, O Jerusalem, for behold thy King cometh!" resounded the booming chorus.

"Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Sion, for this is the day of thy deliverance!" chanted a thousand voices as if they were but one.

The Roman lady gazed anxiously upon this monster gathering.

"Is it then a riot?" she demanded of herself again and a troubled expression passed over her countenance as she realized that if the Jews had thus risen against the power of Rome, that somewhere in that vast concourse of insurgents, her husband might be in danger

for he was a commander whose duty it was to maintain peace in the Holy City during the festal seasons.

"Gods of Rome whom I love and serve, protect my husband from the murderous attacks of those savage Hebrews," she prayed.

Then on the instant she remembered that Faustinus was an officer of the Praetorian Guards, and though he would not be sent directly to assist in quelling a riot unless the personal safety of the Governor were concerned, still knowing the young officer's bitter animosity towards the Jews, she felt that he would ask leave to accompany any expedition which might be sent to punish Hebrews who engaged in a riot.

A great fear seized upon the Roman matron, as she thought of the possible danger to her husband and her daughter's lover.

It was not that Gratiana was a coward or that the career of arms was hateful to her; rather she dreaded what she termed the "insidious practises of the savage Jews" for with her Roman superstitions she felt that they might by diabolic incantations or charms work evil upon her loved ones, injuring them more grievously than sword or spear could do.

She peered over the balustrade again, and there in the midst of the motley crowd she could see the armor of the Roman soldiery gleaming in the sunlight. But there was no conflict in progress. The troops were marching peacefully away from the scene of the demonstration towards their quarters not far from her own home.

"Hosanna! Hosanna! Rejoice, for today the King hath come," rang out again the cheers of the crowd.

"Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord!" answered a thousand voices in chorus, and then even as Gratiana watched the crowds dispersed.

A sigh of relief escaped her lips as she realized that this unusual procession was ended, and danger to Rome had passed. She cast another glance in the direction of the advancing cohort, and descried at its head her husband, Donatus, mounted on his noble charger.

On and on came the soldiers until at length they reached the Fortress of Antonia. Then Donatus leaving the head of the ranks withdrew to one side so that the troops passed before him on entering their barracks.

Dipping the colors and with customary salutes the army passed within, the general following when all had entered. Two servants came to swing the great iron gates together again but halted in their task and saluted a young officer who at that moment rode from the fortress out into the highway.

From the house-top the Roman lady saw him and she burst forth into an exclamation of pleasure as she noted that he turned his horse's head towards her castle.

"Lo, Faustinus cometh," she said. "He will tell me all concerning this celebration of the fanatical Hebrews."

The general's mansion was but a few yards from the Fortress, so that presently a maid servant announced the arrival of the Praetorian Colonel.

"Bid him enter," commanded the matron haughtily.

In an instant the young officer stood bowing before the mother of the woman he loved.

"Fair and gracious lady, I salute thee," he said.

"Welcome Faustinus, how fareth it with thee?" inquired the other.

"The gods look kindly on me and favor me, my lady," he replied smilingly.

"It is well," returned the woman affectionately.

Faustinus glanced longingly towards the bower, and Gratiana divining the meaning of the look answered provokingly:

"She is not there."

"Not there?" repeated the other in dismay.

"Nay."

"But where is my loved one?" he pursued. "She hath not gone abroad I trust,"—for a great fear had come upon Faustinus that Aureliana might have gone out in her carriage and perhaps had been waylaid by the Jewish processionists.

His hostess seeing his distressed look quickly relieved his mind of all worry.

"Dispel thy fear," she soothed, "my daughter walketh in the garden with her maids."

"May Bacchus be praised!" exclaimed the soldier. "I feared that my lady Aureliana had ventured out on this day when 'twould have perhaps cost her her life."

"Thou speakest of the demonstration, I presume. I saw the crowds and heard the cheering. What was their meaning, Faustinus?" asked Gratiana. "Was it a riot of some kind?"

"Nay, my lady. 'Twas but the howling of the Hebrew dogs bringing to the city and their Temple some prattling rabbi who calleth Himself their leader."

"The Hebrews! Their leader! Who is He, my lord?"

"He calleth Himself Jesus, the Christ. He is a Jewish Carpenter who hath learned magician's tricks, and leadeth the people by deception," answered Faustinus and the bitterness of his tone at once convinced the lady that the Praetorian officer hated the Christ.

"Pray seat thyself, my lord, and tell me of Him," she said, amused at the animosity which the colonel displayed for the Hebrew and anxious to hear further.

"Thou sayest that Jesus hath learned magician's tricks," she went on when they were seated within the bower; "but surely that is interesting."

"Thou hast not heard of the Wonder Worker?" queried Faustinus. "Indeed I am surprised for He hath preached throughout Judea and stirred the country up against the rulers, making these cursed Israelites believe themselves greater than we their Roman masters."

"Greater than the Romans dost thou say?" inquired the listener sharply.

"Aye," went on the other. "He calleth Himself a King, and telleth these Jews they are a Chosen People till they now believe 'tis true and seek to free themselves from Caesar's rule."

"A King, my lord? a Chosen People? Strange teachings those! And what result hath been forthcoming?"

"By His magician's art and cunning ways He winneth the hearts of many, and now today they escort Him to the city, crying out in frenzied madness that He is a King, the Son of David. Thou hast heard the cheering and saw the mob. That is the answer to thy question."

As he finished the words he arose in anger and paced up and down the room, his face flushed with rage.

"But there was no bloodshed, my lord?" suggested Gratiana.

"Nay, unfortunately," cried the other. "Ah, these cursed Hebrews, this meddling Christ," he stormed; "were I Pilate I would crush these Jews with all the force and might of mother Rome and throw this Jesus into a dungeon cell. Ah, I loathe Him and despise Him."

He swung his chlamys or military mantle about him in anger as he finished speaking.

"Think not too much of it, my lord," laughed the woman, "for the puny efforts of this misguided Jew avail but little against the Roman gods. He'll fail as others have who sought to thwart the power of our Imperial Mother."

"Aye, my lady, thou speakest aright," he said halting before her "for the priests and the rulers of the nation hate this Christ and plot His death. And, by Jupiter, when they've succeeded in bringing Him to Pilate's Court, to none will it give greater pleasure than to me. And I shall use my influence with the Governor to have Jesus punished for all the mischief that He hath done."

But Faustinus did not tell the Roman matron that he himself was in league with the Pontiffs to bring about the death of the Lord, for that would have lessened her estimation for the man to whom she was to give her daughter, since the Romans valued justice highly, to thwart the exercise of which, was treason and dishonor.

"But, why, my lord Faustinus art thou so concerned?" said the hostess jestingly. "Thou art not a Jew, nor yet a follower of the Hebrew Gods. What mattereth it to thee that the Christ delude His people? Thou shalt not suffer."

"But He hath blinded not alone the Jews," exclaimed the other. "He seeketh also to draw the Romans from the gods we serve."

"Thy words surprise me, Faustinus," quoth Gratiana in wonder. "But tell me quickly hath He made inroads upon our cult?"

Encouraged by the woman's tone the officer began heatedly:

"My lady——"

But just at that moment Aureliana appeared with her two Roman servants at the portal of the bower. Faustinus went forward to meet her and conduct her within.

"My lady Aureliana, my queen, I salute thee," he said. "Thy beauty entranceth me; thou art supremely lovely."

The blind girl was momentarily surprised at hearing his voice, having been unaware of his arrival.

"Thou hast a courtier's tongue, Faustinus," she greeted him banteringly, "and well thou mightest, for thou didst learn thy flattery at Caesar's court."

Faustinus and Gratiana laughed good-naturedly and the girl became thus aware of her mother's presence.

"I hear thy pleasant voice, my mother."

"Aye, my child, I sat with thy lover awaiting thy return."

"Let me lead thee to thy couch, Aureliana," put in the officer, suiting the action to the words.

"Thou art ever kind and gentle," she said as she seated herself beside him on the wicker divan.

Then to the servants she spoke sweetly:

"My ladies, ye may go."

And bowing the two white-robed maidens left the chamber.

"Thou didst enjoy thy walk, my child?" queried the mother when Aureliana had seated herself.

"Yes, mother, we strolled beside the lake; and, O, the enchanting atmosphere which hangeth upon its silver bosom! All was still and quiet, save when the sounds of cheering came from the street beyond."

Now the garden of the general's palace was a secluded spot, its high walls and lofty trees preventing the noise of the world outside from entering to dis-

turb its occupants. Thus Aureliana had heard the shouts and cheering of the multitude but faintly, and could not know the words of praise they had sung in honor of the Christ.

"Thou heardst the cheering?" inquired Gratiana.

"Yea, my mother. What was its meaning?" she asked, casually.

"It was shouting, accompanying a demonstration."

"A demonstration, mother? For what purpose was it held?"

"Faustinus will tell thee, child," answered the Roman matron kindly. "He was there and can tell thee all about it."

"Oh tell me, please, my loved one," cried the girl eagerly putting out her arms helplessly in her blindness.

"But presently I narrated to thy mother what had transpired. The cheering was but the howling of these cursed Hebrew dogs escorting to the city a worthless rabbi who calleth Himself the Christ," said the officer.

As though electrified by the words Aureliana sat upright breathlessly, exclaiming:

"The Christ!"

"Aye," said the officer flattered by the interest which his tale had awakened in her. "The Christ. He is Jesus, a Carpenter from Nazareth."

"But what was the meaning of the shouts?" begged Aureliana, a great fear upon her that perhaps the Master had been taken by His enemies, for she remembered Rebecca had told her of the plot to kill Him.

"Shouts of greeting and acclaim," answered the colonel. "He hath proclaimed Himself a King. But why art thou startled so?" he asked kindly, noting the agitation the girl displayed.

Aureliana thought a moment before answering him. From the tone in which he had spoken of the Master it was evident to her that her lover was not friendly towards Him. It were useless then, at this time, to make known her own feelings regarding Jesus. That she would do later when a more opportune moment arrived. So aloud, she said simply:

"Ah, nothing. Only I have oft-times heard of Him and all He's done amongst His people. Thy sudden mention of His name recalled the stories I have heard of wonders He hath done."

"Magician's tricks," exclaimed the mother arising. "Let's not talk again of Jesus. 'Tis but useless waste of time."

She bowed to the officer, saying as she did so:

"Vale, my lord. I must repair below. I shall leave thee here with Aureliana."

Faustinus returned the bow.

"May the gods keep thee," he said.

"Vale, my loved one," the mother continued, kissing her daughter affectionately.

"Thou are so kind and good, mother dear," said the blind girl sweetly returning the embrace. Then laughing gaily she continued:

"Oh I am so happy, happy; it seemeth to me that I have never known such joy before."

"Happy? It is well, my beloved," cried Faustinus flattering himself in thinking that the news of their betrothal which Gratiana must have communicated to Aureliana was the cause of the latter's good humor.

And the mother pressing her child closer to her maternal bosom was pleased to see the buoyancy of spirits which had come upon her, attributing it to the presence of the man whom she loved so much and whom she was to marry:

"I understand, my dear," she whispered into the girl's ear.

But the latter added simply:  
"I wonder."

Ah, no, Gratiana, the worldly pagan could not possibly have understood the joy which filled the maiden's heart! For though Aureliana was pleased in knowing that she would be the wife of Faustinus, the joy which that knowledge occasioned was as nothing beside the great interior happiness which filled her upon learning that at last Jesus had declared Himself a King unto His nation and the world. And this it was which now made her so gay and bright.

Thus, wholly ignorant of her daughter's real feelings, Gratiana quitted the chamber leaving Aureliana alone with her future husband—Faustinus, the Praetorian colonel.

## CHAPTER XI

### COME, FOLLOW ME, ON CALVARY'S ROAD

**T**HY mother hath told thee that 'tis settled and thou shalt be my wife?" asked Faustinus eagerly when Gratiana had departed from the bower.

"Aye, Faustinus, my dear; and it doth please me so," returned the girl.

She paused and a radiant expression crossed her countenance.

"Ah, yes, my love, I am happy. Oh, so happy that I am to be thy bride, that I reproach myself with being selfish," she continued.

"Selfish, Aureliana, my dear," burst forth her lover, "all of us have faults, no doubt; but, surely, none could ever say of thee that thou art selfish. Rather thou art self-sacrificing and generous to a degree of nobleness."

"Thou art so kind and gentle, my love, thou seekest always to defend me," said his companion sweetly.

"And should I not, beloved?"

"Oh, it doth please me, because I know thou lovest me even as I in turn love thee."

At the words the officer drew the maiden to him in an affectionate embrace.

"Thy father hath at last agreed that thou shalt be my wife," he went on gaily, "and O, my love, at last I shall have thee, for whom my heart hath pined since first I knew thee."

'Tis just this morning scarce an hour since, my

mother told me 'twas agreed between thee and my father."

"And it did please thee?" coaxed Faustinus.

"Please me," replied the girl. "Ah, Faustinus, it hath sent a thrill of pleasure through me making me as though I trod on air. Pleased, my love! Nay, rather it hath delighted me beyond the measure which words can express."

Exulting in the girl's enthusiasm the soldier bent over her and kissed her tenderly.

"Aureliana, my own, more beautiful than Diana," he whispered, "I kneel in homage at thy feet, for I adore thee. Fairer than all others whom I've seen art thou, my queen, lovelier than the loveliest at the Roman court. With such an one as thou beside him as his wife what more could one demand of life, what greater happiness could this world bestow? My treasure and my all, I long for thee each day, and am content only when thou art near me."

"Even as I, too, my love," softly answered the blind girl.

"Since that sad morning three years ago when thy sight was taken from thee," he continued, "day by day I've yearned for thee and would have taken thee in marriage long ago, were it not that thy father coun-selled me to defer the event."

"Thus spoke my mother," said the other.

"But, oh, the weary months and years of waiting," he went on, "wanting thee so much only to be denied. Often I renewed my plea with thy good father, but always I was forced to wait, until at length desperate with desire for thee, it seemed that I must take thee forcibly."

"But thou wouldest not do that?" she teased.

"Aye, even that I'd do, if by that means alone I

might possess thee. For I love thee, dear, and can ne'er be happy till thou art my spouse."

"And didst thou tell my father of this mad design?" she questioned laughingly.

"I did, my love," he answered, "and he, seeing that I was determined granted my request, and told me that I might have thy hand at once."

"But we must wait, even yet," she reminded him.

"Aye, but that is Pilate's doing," he commented.

"Two years," she repeated meditatively.

"'Tis not long," he said cheerfully, "for hope deferred is better far than mere uncertainty. And yet I fear these two years more of waiting will seem a life-time to me, anxious as I am to have thee."

He paused a moment, then he asked playfully:

"Thou too shalt find the time a little long?"

"Faustinus dear," replied Aureliana, "if thou couldst but look within my heart and see the love which burneth there for thee, then perhaps thou wouldest understand how I shall count the hours and the days till I am thine. If thou couldst know the misery I have endured these three years past; verily, thou wouldest comprehend how I have wanted thee."

She stopped and Faustinus softly whispered:

"I understand, Aureliana, my beloved."

Encouraged by his words she resumed:

"Just when my cup of happiness seemed full and I would have drunk of its sweetness, it was cruelly dashed from my lips and on the very day when our betrothal would have been announced, blindness came upon me and took thee from me."

Faustinus drew her closer to him.

"Oh, the heartaches I've endured since then and the times I've craved to have thee near me. That, of itself, were crushing in its weight, but add to that the lonely

hours which my blindness bringeth, and then perhaps thou wilt have some vague idea of how I've thought of thee."

The officer touched by his companion's words was silent for a moment when she had finished. Then seeking to cheer her he began pleasantly:

"But think no more of these things, dear. Forget the past; look only to the future which is bright."

But her tone was unchanged as she replied still sadly:

"Aye, I have and do."

The colonel glanced sharply at her, as she continued speaking slowly and in measured tones:

"Generously hast thou asked my hand, and gladly do I give it to thee. But because I love thee so, and want only to make thee happy, listen to what I shall say, and ponder well upon my words. Together we shall consider them and guide our future by the decision we shall reach. 'Twere better that we talk the matter over now than live to regret a hasty action."

"Aureliana, my love, what dost thou mean?"

"This, my dear. Thou art a brilliant officer to whom promotion and honors needs must come. One day thou shalt hold a post of merit in the Imperial Capital and bask in Caesar's favor. My one desire is that when at length that time hath arrived thou mayst have all that is befitting to thy station, and above all, that thou wilt be supremely happy."

"But my love of that I am well aware. I know that thou dost wish me well and thou shalt make me happy."

"Thy wife should be one who could take her place beside thee at state functions and at least be the equal of the others who attend. But, my love, I am blind and when thou shalt be summoned to the Emperor's throne thou must go without me. Think, my own.

Wilt thou then be happy when thou art burdened with a wife who is not a helpmate but a hindrance; who instead of adding to thy glory will detract from it? Will not thy brother officers and the nobles brand thee and scoff at thee as one chained by the helplessness of a miserable woman?"

"But, my darling!" interrupted Faustinus.

"I love thee too dearly to let thee suffer because of me. O Faustinus dear, thou art but young; and we are in Judea far from Rome, our common mother. When we think of the future, let it be with the Imperial City as a background."

"Aureliana, my beloved, thou art overwrought. Thou must not talk so," he interjected again.

"Hear me to the end, my own," she said dispassionately. "I would much prefer that I should never be thy bride, than that I should live to be a reproach to thee or be separated in affection from thee. Go from my side, my loved one, seek some other maiden as thy wife, if deep within thy spirit thou hast reason to believe that I shall mar thy happiness or thy fortunes. Oh, I love thee, but I shall gladly make the sacrifice for thy sake, and none shall be the wiser. It may hurt indeed to live without thee, but even so I'll always love thee, and real love is based on sacrifice."

Whilst she talked Aureliana had sat motionless, her sightless eyes staring blankly before her and Faustinus could see by the emotion she manifested that the words she had uttered had cost her much.

Amazed at the statements she had made, the officer was at first powerless to reply. But when the sounds of the lovely voice at his side had faded into silence and he knew that she had finished the realization of all that she had said rushed upon him. The heroic sacrifice she was willing to make for his happiness

demonstrated the depth of the love she bore him. A terrible fear seized upon his heart that perhaps she would put her words into effect and refuse to marry him.

A mad impulse to snatch her to him and take her away by force surged over him but his saner judgment prevailed and he said, embracing her lovingly:

"Aureliana, my noble, generous sweetheart, put from thy mind such thoughts as those to which thou hast given utterance. There is no reason why thou should permit thy mind to be disquieted. Surely I love thee not less than thou lovest me and the passing years will not change my heart towards thee. What care I, my own, for what the court may say of me? What doth it matter if the nobles joke at my expense, if I have thee and, loving thee, am happy? Speak not of sacrifice, my dear. There is no need of such; and were there, gladly would I make any sacrifice for thy sake. There's nothing I would not do for thee."

"Ah, thank thee, my splendid lover," she said. "I shall put from mind, then, even as thou sayst these thoughts which agitate me and think only of the unalloyed contentment which the future holdeth for us."

Well pleased that his words had changed her, Faus-tinus stroked her soft brown tresses and then kissed her tenderly.

"What a noble Roman spirit dwelleth within thee," he whispered. "Thou art capable of making any sacrifice."

Aureliana said nothing but his words had set her thinking.

He had praised her spirit of sacrifice, calling it noble and Roman. Ah, little did he know that she had learned the meaning of sacrifice from a Hebrew!

The man noting that the girl did not speak, and thinking that she sought to compose herself after the storm which had just passed over her, sat quietly beside her.

But the maiden's thoughts were far away. She was thinking of Rebecca and of what the latter had told her of sacrifice as taught by Jesus of Nazareth. She was thinking, too, of the Master Himself and of His entry into the City.

She did not like the tone in which her lover had spoken of the Christ. The bitter way in which he had pronounced His name had shocked her. Surely Faustinus could not share the hatred of the Jewish Pontiffs for the innocent Carpenter! She would speak to the man she loved, she reflected, and tell him that she believed in Christ, and ask him to protect Him, or at least to speak respectfully of Him even though He were a Jew. Her lover would not refuse her, she was certain; for had he not promised he would do anything she might ask? And yet, withal, she thought again, would it be wise to mention it today when the officer was perhaps incensed against the Hebrew Leader? Supposing he should refuse to grant her plea! What then could she do? Would it not be subjecting him to an unfair test? Should she let the Christ be the cause of her quarrelling with her future husband? Surely the Master would not ask that of her, she decided. After all, Faustinus and she were Romans, and the Christ was a Jew. Should she let Him come between them? That were asking too much. Yet, she remembered Rebecca had told her that sacrifice consisted in giving up one's most cherished treasure or foregoing the performance of one's will for the sake of another or for an idea. Perhaps it were better to speak to her lover now, and tell him that the teachings

of the Hebrew Rabbi meant much to her and she would like him to think kindly of Jesus.

Summoning all her courage she reached forth blindly, and touching the officer upon the arm said slowly:

"Faustinus dear, there is something I would tell thee."

"I am listening, love," he answered.

"Thou hast——"

But she got no further, for at that moment Donatus entered the chamber.

"Ah, children, I thought I'd find you here," he said cheerily.

Faustinus jumped to his feet and saluted his superior officer. The latter returned the greeting.

"My little girl is gay and happy as is her wont?" said the general, seating himself near Aureliana.

"Ever, father. And it is good to hear thy voice."

The commander motioned to the colonel to be seated before answering.

"My little daughter is happy today, Faustinus," he went on, "for doubtless thou hast told her of our agreement concerning the marriage."

"Aye, my lord, I've told her," replied the junior officer.

"O my father, I am so happy, happy that the whole world seemeth to smile upon me. In my joy I almost forget that I am blind, and seem to see thy face again upon which I gazed in happier days."

The girl's words stabbed the father's heart. A look of sadness crossed his kindly countenance, as he answered.

"Some day thou shalt look again upon it, for the great physicians of the land will surely cure thee."

Then, as if wishing to divert his daughter's mind from thoughts of her affliction, he added hastily:

"I too am happy, my little one, for I am giving thee to one than whom there is none finer in the Roman army."

Faustinus blushed at the words of his chief, and replied:

"I shall try to be worthy of her and what thou sayst of me, my lord."

"Thou shalt be," said the commander, patting the colonel on the shoulder. "We shall announce the news of the betrothal when we return shortly to Cæsarea and give a banquet equal in magnificence to that deferred three years ago."

"Thou art good, my father," said the maiden sweetly.

"Not too good for such a daughter as thou," said the father arising and kissing his child.

What a splendid picture they presented, this mighty general and his lovely daughter! He was arrayed in all the warlike armor which he had worn when seated at the head of the cohort on the roadway just shortly since. She was clothed in a simple tunic of palest blue which suited her fragile beauty even as did his martial dress, her father's towering frame. And though the slender form of the gentle maiden was not the counterpart of the powerful man beside her, yet she reflected his strength in the noble character she had inherited from him.

"I must return," he said.

"So soon?" asked the girl.

Faustinus arose and stood beside the commander.

"Aye," said the general, "for the population is in a state of great excitement, and I must see that the streets are well patrolled with soldiers lest some disturbance arise."

"Hast thou need of me, my lord?" asked the junior officer.

"Yea, Faustinus," said the general. "It would be well, I think, for thee to accompany me unto the Fortress. My daughter will spare thee for this one day; wilt thou not, my child?"

"Aye," she laughed, "for soon we shall be together never to be parted."

"Then we shall leave thee," replied her father. "Art thou ready, Faustinus?"

"Aye, my lord," replied the other, bending upon Aureliana and kissing her.

"Farewell for just a little while," he whispered, "and may the gods keep thee."

"I shall think of thee each moment until thou wilt return," said the maiden, pressing her lover's hand.

"Vale, child of my heart, and light of my life," said the father standing at the portal.

The colonel followed his chief, and in a moment both men had quitted the bower.

She could hear the steps of the retreating soldiers as they walked along the terrace to the marble steps leading below. Then the sounds died away, and Aureliana was left with silence and darkness as her sole companions.

Her thoughts turned to Faustinus and the news of her betrothal, and a little feeling of pleasure thrilled her again. Then she remembered that she had been on the point of divulging to him her belief in Jesus when the entrance of her father had deterred her. She would speak of it at their next meeting, she decided.

Soon she found herself thinking of the Christ, and the demonstration which the city had given in His honor.

"He hath proclaimed Himself a King," she mur-

mured. "Perhaps Rebecca's words will now come true and He will deliver His nation."

She recalled Johanan's words, 'Jesus will repay thee,' and she wondered if the Carpenter would really do so. Well, even if He never did, she reflected, she was happy that He had been greeted with a royal welcome, for He was a prophet of the Hebrew God, so her maid had said.

She strained her ears, hoping that perhaps she might hear the cheering again. But, no, all was silent; and she decided that the procession must have ended long ago.

Then she began to wonder what the Carpenter looked like. She tried to picture Him as Rebecca had often described Him. She depicted Him in fancy, standing beside her, a Figure beautiful and fair with flowing hair and deep blue eyes. She gazed upon this vision of her imagination until it became a reality to her, and she imagined that she heard a Voice speaking softly to her in the darkness:

"Aureliana, my child, thou art a pagan, but I am pleased with thee."

And she thought she could hear herself answering joyfully:

"Lord, let me know Thy will."

Then the Figure spoke again.

"Come, follow Me."

"Where, Lord?" she caught herself asking.

"On Calvary's Road," replied the phantom of her brain.

"But whither leadeth that road, Master?"

"To God and Glory Eternal," said the other Voice.

"But how shall I learn to walk that road?" she asked.

"Through sacrificing all things in My name."

"Who art Thou, Lord?"

"I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God," spoke the other.

Then the vision faded. But a great joy filled her soul.

A voice at her elbow said gently:

"My mistress, I sought thee, for it is growing late."

The blind girl awoke from her reverie with a start, knowing it to be Rebecca, her servant, who had just addressed her.

For a moment she was too confused to utter a word, not sure whether she had had a dream or a vision. But be what it may, the words which she had heard the Figure speak still lingered in her memory.

'Come, follow Me on Calvary's Road, which leadeth to God and Eternal Glory. Sacrifice all things in my name, for I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God.'

How long had she slept or day-dreamed, she wondered. Was it night or day? But, of course, she could not tell, for it was always night to her since she was blind. Then she remembered that Rebecca was near her and would tell her.

"What hour is it, Rebecca?" she asked.

"Long past the ninth hour, my lady," answered the servant.

"Ah, I have slept," remarked the girl simply, but she made no mention of what she had seen and heard when slumber was upon her. She merely added:

"I shall go with thee, Rebecca."

The servant placed her arm about her mistress to assist her to her feet, when the latter detained her.

"Tell me first, Rebecca, of the Christ," she pleaded. "I heard the cheering and was told that He had entered as a King. Didst thou hear aught of that?"

"Aye, my lady, it is true," replied the other, a tone

of happiness in her voice. "A great procession escorted Him through the city even to the Temple. I myself took part."

"Thou didst take part, Rebecca!"

"Aye, in truth, and I saw and heard all."

"Then tell me, for I yearn to know," cried the Roman, eagerly.

"Whilst we were at Caesarea at thy castle," began the servant, "before we returned unto Jerusalem with thy father's retinue, Jesus entering Bethany found his friend Lazarus dead and in the tomb three days. Going to the grave the Master brought the dead man back to life."

"Brought him back to life!" echoed the blind girl in dismay.

"Aye," replied the servant. "And this great miracle, added to all that He had done before, convinced the people that He is the Christ, the Promised Messiah of our Nation. So today when He returned to the Holy City for the Feast of the Passover the multitudes went out to meet Him, and waving palms and strewing their garments underneath His feet, shouted out in one accord: "Hosanna to the Son of David, blessed be He who cometh in the name of the Lord!"

"Were these the sounds I heard?"

"Doubtless, my lady, for the great assemblage sang with force and earnestness."

"But why did the people defer the welcome until now? Is it nigh two weeks since we have quitted Caesarea?"

"Dost thou remember, my lady, that I told thee once that the High Priests fearing for their influence with the people, and jealous of the Christ sought to kill Him?"

"I do," returned the other.

"I heard it said today amongst the crowds that Jesus, hearing of the plot, withdrew into the desert of Ephrem and that the Priests and people sought Him vainly. This is His first appearance amongst the populace since the great miracle, and the multitudes did Him honor to the chagrin of the Pontiffs."

"Thinkest thou that He will now declare Himself the Saviour of thy people?" asked Aureliana.

"Verily. I think that now the prophets will be fulfilled. That Christ, the Lord will set His throne in Jerusalem and prove Himself the Saviour foretold and promised by Jehovah, our God."

"Spoke He aught amidst the cheering of the crowds?" queried the girl.

"Scarce a word, my lady. His face did shine like that of one divine. His eyes were lifted to the skies above. His lips were moving, but in silent prayer. In truth, the Christ was god-like."

The other said nothing, and the Hebrew, glancing at her, noticed that she was greatly agitated.

"Rebecca," at length came the maiden's voice softly, "Rebecca, lead me out upon the terrace."

The servant did as she was commanded, conducting her mistress amidst the flowers of the roof-garden.

"Help me to my knees," said the other, "and turn me so that I may face thy Temple."

The older woman obeyed and knelt beside the girl.

Slowly the latter lifted her arms till they were outstretched in an attitude of prayer.

Rebecca watched in wonder, and even as she did so she heard the other's voice.

"Christ, my Lord, could I have followed in the crowd which welcomed Thee this day, gladly would I have done so, for I believe Thou art the Christ, the Son of God. I'm not a Hebrew, nor one of Thine own

Chosen Children; I am but a pagan, blind, miserable and unhappy. But from this terrace which is my prison, too, I raise my humble voice and add my lowly homage to Thee, on this Thy day of triumph. Johanan, who is Thy servant bade me hope, promising Thou wouldest hear me. Maybe Thou art at this moment in yonder Temple; but where e'er Thou art, Thou wilt hear my voice, for Thou art god-like. Listen, then deign to accept my prayers: I foreswear allegiance to the Roman gods, and believe henceforth in the Hebrew God Jehovah, and in Thee His Son."

She finished the prayer, but still remained kneeling. Rebecca arose from her knees and stood gazing out upon the view towards the Temple. She could see the terraces rising one above the other till they culminated in the Sanctuary.

And as she looked, from one of the portals of the Temple, there emerged a solitary Figure clothed in white.

Was it a coincidence that It stopped and cast one look towards the direction of Aureliana's home? Who can say?

But the excited servant on the house-top shouted breathlessly to her mistress:

"My lady, my lady, look, it is the Christ! He is walking on the terrace of the Temple yonder."

Aureliana jumped to her feet, only to cry out disappointedly:

"I cannot see, Rebecca. Didst thou forget that I am blind?"

The servant looked again. Christ had turned and was descending the Mount and in a moment was lost to view.

## CHAPTER XII

### WOE TO YOU SCRIBES AND PHARISEES

FROM the enthusiastic reception accorded Jesus by the populace upon His entrance to the Holy City, it was evident to the Sanhedrin councillors that the plans for His capture which they had so carefully prepared had ended in dismal failure.

With bitterness they were forced to admit that He was much more popular than they had dreamed, and that now He had become a veritable idol with the people.

The rulers had hoped that Christ would by some word or sign inimical to the Empire draw down upon Himself the displeasure of the Roman authorities, but on the contrary they noted with disappointment that the demonstration of which He had been the central Figure had proven to be entirely peaceful and free from anything which might antagonize the Governor.

At the secret meeting held three weeks earlier on the Mount of Evil Council, Caiaphas and his followers had decided that Jesus by His doctrines sought to revolutionize the Jewish religion and was seriously endangering their own prestige and position with the people. In consequence they had concluded, as we have seen, that for their own well-being and safety it was necessary that He should die.

It had seemed to them an easy matter to apprehend the Carpenter, and then to have Him put to death by

the Romans under the pretext that He had been preaching sedition against the Empire. But the most ardent lover of the Eagle could not find anything reprehensible in the Master's conduct today, when a real opportunity had been presented to Him of seriously injuring the Emperor's hold upon Judea. Certainly that vast body which had surrounded Jesus was far from being hostile towards the Imperial interests, and the Man Himself was obviously a lover of peace.

So it was clear to the Pharisees and the Sadducees that some new scheme must be concocted by which the death of the Master might be brought about, for they could never again go to the foreigner with a tale of Christ's seditious utterances and hope to be believed. To do so would be only courting the ridicule of the officers at the Praetorium and they felt they had already made fools enough of themselves in having a whole Roman cohort drawn up at their request to quell what Gazar had promised, in their name, would be a riot.

The promised disturbance had not taken place and the old Sadducee trembled with fear as he thought of how enraged Faustinus must be with him for having sent the soldiers on an idle quest.

When the noise and excitement attendant upon the Christ's triumphal entry had at last died away and quiet was again restored in the Holy City, a number of His enemies met in the home of Caleb, a Pharisee, to discuss the situation in detail.

Caiaphas presided, and Gazar and a number of the bitterest members of the Sanhedrin were present. The old Sadducee said very little, maintaining through the session such a gloomy silence that it aroused the wonder of many present.

Gazar was not bothering much about Jesus just then. His thoughts were concerned chiefly with him-

self and Faustinus. He was much worried, fearing that the officer on finding that he had been duped might decide to report the matter to the Governor who could make things particularly unpleasant for the Jew to the extent even of throwing him into prison and dispossessing him of his wealth and lands.

Far into the night the councillors sat and talked, and when at length the meeting was adjourned a new plan of action had been formulated.

Hitherto in accordance with their policy of taking Jesus as an enemy of the Empire the Sadducees had been the movers in executing the details of the scheme since the members of that sect were friendly with the Romans. Now, however, it was decided to arrange a plot to have Jesus discredit Himself in the eyes of the people, and the Pharisees were to be charged with its successful accomplishment.

Accordingly when the gathering finally disbanded the members felt much happier than they had in the morning when they had witnessed the triumph of the Saviour, for now their hope was renewed that they would succeed in taking Him.

"Take courage, man," said Caiaphas to Gazar, as the two men left Caleb's home. "Thou art gloomy. What aileth thee? Is it because we failed to take the Nazarene? If so, be of good cheer, for in a few days He will be in our power."

"I am not thinking of Jesus," replied the other nervously. "I am disturbed by the thoughts of what might befall me should Faustinus speak ill of me to the Governor because of the fool's errand upon which the soldiers were sent today through my fault."

"Nay, think not of it," counselled the High Priest. "The officer will understand that 'twas not thy fault that a riot was averted. And even so should the worst

befall thee and thou wert taken before the judgment seat I'm sure that with thy diplomatic tongue thou wouldst find a means of turning the affair to thine own advantage."

Gazar laughed gloomily at the flattery and parted from his friend to enter the conveyance which was to take him to his home. And the Pontiff going alone into the darkness smiled at the old man's discomfiture, chuckling to himself as he murmured half aloud:

" 'Twould serve the old miser right to have him sacrifice some of his wealth. Would that I had Pilate's power and I would find a means to make myself possessor of a goodly portion of it."

Then he forgot Gazar on the instant, and thought of Jesus whom he hated.

Early the next day—the second of the week or what would be Monday of our reckoning—the Pharisees betook themselves to the Temple for the purpose of ensnaring the Master. But although Jesus was in the Temple and taught the multitudes, no opportunity was given to His enemies to put their scheme into execution.

But on the day following, Tuesday, the long-looked-for moment arrived.

Christ was teaching the people in one of the Temple courts when a little group approached Him.

The newcomers were members of the party of Herodians who were despised by the Pharisees because thy had openly espoused the cause of Rome. But on this occasion, strange to say, these Herodians were accompanied by a number of the less prominent Pharisaical members of the Sanhedrin.

The plan was that the Herodians were to go to the Master and question Him. Now seeing that they were strangers to Him and the Pharisees who were with

them were not well known either to the Carpenter or the people, it was supposed that Jesus would by His answer put Himself in their power whereupon He would be turned over to Caiaphas who would have Him punished.

"Master," they said deferentially as they came near to Him, "we know that Thou art a true speaker, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man, for Thou dost not regard the person of men."

Jesus looked at them not unkindly, and after a moment's pause they continued:

"Tell us, therefore, what dost Thou think? Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar or not?"

This was by far the most clever plan the enemies of the Lord had yet devised for His capture, and it seemed that at last they had Him in their power. How could He possibly escape this time?"

The taxes imposed by Rome were decidedly unpopular with the Jews, and were a constant source of grievance and grumbling on the part of the people against the Imperial oppressors.

Thus for Jesus to answer 'yes' to the question put to Him would be to turn the populace against Him. To say 'no' would render Him liable to a charge of treason, which might draw down upon Himself the Governor's vengeance.

Seeing the trap, the Master turned to His questioners and said:

"Why do ye tempt Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the coin of the tribute."

And they offered Him a penny.

Jesus examined the coin. Then regarding His enemies with a questioning glance He asked:

"Whose image and inscription is this?"

They answered promptly:  
“Caesar’s.”

Then said the Lord slowly and with emphasis:  
“Render therefore to Caesar the things that are  
Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

The Pharisees were confounded for Christ had turned the plot to His own advantage.

The bystanders cheered the wisdom of the Master, whilst the infuriated Herodians and their companions slunk away in confusion.

In a secluded spot of the Court, Caleb, Caiaphas and other leaders of the Sanhedrin awaited the results of the questioning. So sure were they of the success of the project that the arrival of their defeated emissaries completely disconcerted them.

Caleb was the first to speak when the Herodians and the Pharisees who had accompanied them recounted Christ’s answer regarding the payment of the tax.

“By the God of our fathers this man, Jesus, outwitteth us at every move,” he said.

“Aye,” quoth Phinehas, another Pharisee, “but surely we shall find some way to take Him. Otherwise our standing with the people is forever ruined.”

“We must have Him in our power e’er the sun hath set this day,” cried Caiaphas in indignation at the latest defeat his party had sustained at the hands of the Carpenter. “This time we shall take Him.”

The High Priest’s words met with the hearty approval of the other members of his party, and they set about considering what was to be done.

They discussed thoroughly every angle of the situation and when at length they again sought out the Christ they were determined that He should not slip from their grasp.

Now there was amongst the Sanhedrin councillors a man named Jehonias. He was a doctor learned in the Law and striving to serve God in all things.

Whilst not a party to the schemes by which the enemies of the Saviour had sought His death, Jehonias had been present at their meetings, and at the council held at Gazar's home had even spoken a word in support of Johanan when the seer had defended Christ.

At first wavering in regard to the doctrines which Jesus taught, he had been gradually won over to the side of Caiaphas and the rest. And whilst he was not vehement in his denunciations of the Christ, yet of late he said no word in His defense.

It was this man who was chosen to lead the Pharisees' final attack against the Carpenter. And the honor (as Caiaphas termed it) was being given to Jehonias for the purpose of holding him, since he would no doubt feel himself obliged to remain loyal to those who evidently had such confidence in him as to entrust such a weighty mission to him.

The High Priest had made a good selection for the task, since there was none more learned in sacred lore than Jehonias, and his vanity was so tickled with the trust reposed in him that he entered heartily into the project and promised to do all that was asked of him.

Late that afternoon in the company of a number of the Pharisees he approached Jesus as the latter still taught the multitudes in the court.

"Master," he said, "which is the great commandment in the Law?"

The people pressed closer about Jesus at the Pharisee's questioning, sensing a new discussion, and anxious to hear how the Master would answer.

Christ regarded Jehonias a moment before He replied and the councillor winced under the look. The

Saviour was not angry with the man. He felt rather a great compassion for one who was such a weakling. He was well aware of the import of the question. He knew the idle discussions amongst the scribes and the doctors of the Law regarding the chief precept, and He knew also the quibbling of the rabbis. This man was the tool of the Pontiffs, He knew, and was subjecting Him to a public test hoping to ridicule and disgrace Him in the eyes of the people.

Slowly and majestically He made answer.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind," He said. "This is the first and the greatest commandment. And the second is like unto this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

The populace was deeply impressed with the Master's words and Jehonias himself was so moved that he cried out earnestly:

"Master, Thou hast said the truth that there is but one God and that He should be loved with the whole heart and with the whole soul and with the whole strength and to love one's neighbor as one's self is a greater thing than all holocausts and sacrifices."

And saying these words the Jewish doctor came nearer to the Christ and stood beside Him.

The latter looked kindly upon him, saying at the same time:

"Thou hast spoken well, my son. Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."

And Jehonias pleased with the Master's words remained where he stood, whilst the other Pharisees scowled with anger that their colleague had been obviously won over to the side of the Carpenter since he was now mingling with the apostles.

But even as they murmured, indignantly Jesus addressed them this question:

"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"

But they held their peace and said nothing.

Again He repeated His question, whereupon Caleb answered:

"David's."

"Then," said Christ, "how doth David in spirit call Him Lord? For if David call Him Lord, how is He his son?"

The Pharisees completely confounded replied not a word. And the people noting their discomfiture laughed and jeered at them so that they were greatly angered. But Jehonias paying no heed to the plight of his erstwhile friends was deep in conversation with Peter, the apostle.

A look of great revulsion passed over the countenance of Jesus, as His gaze fell upon the leaders of the people.

All through His public life they had been His chief enemies and had over and over again sought to discredit His work. By their lives of lying, hypocrisy and deceitful practices they posed as paragons of virtue in the eyes of the world, whereas they were in reality corrupted parasites, scoundrels blackened with every crime, fattening at the expense of the simple God-fearing Israelites.

Because they were, many of them, Priests of Jehovah and leaders of the people, Christ had so far spared them. But since His hour was now at hand He decided that He would expose them publicly before He left this world.

Pointing to where they stood He raised His voice, now tense with a holy anger, and addressed the people:

"The scribes and Pharisees have sitten on the chair

of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you observe and do. But according to their works do ye not, for they say and themselves do not," He said.

"For they bind heavy and insupportable burdens and lay them on men's shoulders but with a finger of their own they will not move them."

Angered to the point of exasperation by the sting of the Master's words, the Pharisees sought to quit the place and turned to find a way from the scene. But the multitude was of such dimensions that the leaders, completely hemmed in, were obliged to remain and hear the full measure of Christ's denunciation.

"All their works they do to be seen by men," He continued. "For they make their phylacteries broad and enlarge their fringes, and they love the first places at feasts and the first chairs in the synagogues and salutations in the market place and to be called by men, Rabbi."

A murmur of approval from the people followed these words, for the crowds hated and despised these leaders who crushed them down and oppressed them and whom they were obliged to obey.

Then Jesus turning addressed the Pharisees:

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye shut the kingdom of Heaven against men for ye yourselves do not enter in and those that are going in ye suffer not to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because ye devour the houses of widows praying long prayers. For this your judgment shall be the more terrible. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, because ye go round about the land and the sea to make one proselyte and when he is made ye make him the child of hell, twofold more than yourselves. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, because ye

tithe mint and anise and cummin and have left the weightier things of the law, judgment, and mercy and faith. These things ye ought to have done and not to leave undone. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, because ye are like to whitened sepulchres which outwardly appear to men beautiful but within are full of dead men's bones and of filthiness. So ye also outwardly indeed appear to men just, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Ye serpents, generation of vipers, how will ye flee from the judgment of hell? Upon you shall come all the just blood that hath been shed upon the earth from the blood of Abel, the just, even unto the blood of Zacharias, the Son of Bacharias, whom ye killed between the Temple and the altar. Amen, I say to you that all these things shall come upon this generation."

Caiaphas and the others who had been waiting in the porch, finding that their messengers had been delayed, came in search of them; and arriving at the place where the crowd was gathered about the Carpenter, were in time to hear the awful indictment pronounced by Jesus against the Pharisees and the leaders generally.

We can well imagine the wrath which filled the Chief Priest and his followers upon hearing these words, and how they actually ached with desire to take this Man and crush Him who dared to speak so openly. But for fear of the people they must restrain themselves.

"By the Lord God of Israel," swore Caiaphas savagely in an undertone, "if none can be found to rid the earth of this meddlesome Rabbi who is possessed of a devil, I myself will kill Him with my own hands."

"This defeat far outweigheth the others," said Gazar gloomily at his side, "for never before hath He dared to speak so vehemently against us."

The Sadducee had scarcely ended his bitter denunciations when Jesus raised His voice again. But now a note of sadness and yearning had come into it, a longing to save these rulers even now if possible.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," He moaned, "thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee. How often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth her chickens under her wings and thou wouldest not? Behold thy house shall be left to thee desolate. For I say to you that ye shall not see me henceforth till ye say, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.' "

Then turning Jesus walked out of the Temple and the populace wondered greatly at all that He had said made way silently for Him to pass from their midst. By the side of Peter, near the Master, was Jehonias.

The Pharisees were so infuriated at the words of the Christ and at the sight of their former colleague walking with Him that they were unable to speak for several moments.

But they were suddenly aroused by the voice of a beggar in tattered garments who shouted at them:

"Behold a Man who speaketh the words of the Most High. For Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

It was Enan who had spoken, he to whom Aureliana had given the bracelet.

The enraged priests would have seized the mendicant and had him flogged, but foreseeing danger he slipped from their midst at once and was immediately hidden in the crowds.

Gradually the throngs dispersed, and the priests made their way slowly from the court.

The latter had come to the great gate and were about to descend the incline when they perceived Jesus just a little in front surrounded by a knot of admirers.

The Pharisees and the rulers drawing near listened to what was said.

"See the wonderful Temple, Master," exclaimed one of those near the Christ.

The latter lifted His eyes and looked upon the grandeur of the mighty fane which was the pride of all Judea, the glory of the Chosen People. Then slowly and sadly he made answer.

"Do ye see all these things? Amen, I say to you there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed."

And saying this He arose and descending the slope of Moriah left the Temple forever.

He walked no more in public until He appeared as a public malefactor before the world.

But on this last appearance with the people His victory was no less complete than that of a few days previous when He had entered the city in triumph as a king. Today He had conquered the Pharisees, and publicly vindicated His position as a teacher sent by God. But by His public denunciation of His enemies He had virtually pronounced His own death sentence. For the leaders of the Jews could not allow the Christ's rebuke to go unnoticed and unanswered without losing every vestige of authority and influence still remaining to them.

His public utterances had been a challenge to them to enter a conflict from which either He or they must emerge victorious.

They were quite convinced that the time had now come when either they or He must go. Jerusalem was not big enough to hold both. And they were fully determined that in the death-struggle Christ would be the loser.

Late that same night, Tuesday of the first Holy

Week, these leaders met again in the palace of Caiaphas on Mount Sion to discuss the day's events.

Still smarting from the sting of the Master's words, they were in a grim, ugly mood as they sat about the council chamber angrily deliberating upon a scheme of vengeance to repay the audacity of this Carpenter, who had dared to lift His voice against them and to menace their position.

The meeting was divided in its opinion as to the best course which should be pursued to bring the Culprit to justice.

Some of the members declared in fiery tones that He must be taken at once and killed. Others with more wisdom counselled the postponement of all action until the Passover festivities were completed, and after much heated discussion it was decided to follow this latter course.

The assembly was on the point of disbanding when a page made his way hurriedly to Caiaphas and spoke in an undertone with him.

A change spread over the latter's face as he made some reply to the servant who turning immediately left the room.

He re-entered in a moment accompanied by a man clothed in a coarse garment of brown material.

The stranger was of swarthy complexion and a heavy black beard fell full upon his breast. His hooked nose and furtive, dark eyes seen clearly in the light from the candelabra above bespoke his Judean origin.

"Who art thou?" demanded Caiaphas sternly.

The man glanced timidly about him before answering.

"I am Judas Iscariot," he said.

"He is an apostle of the Christ," exclaimed several

voices at once, and so hostile were the demonstrations following the information that for a moment the stranger feared he would be set upon by the rulers.

But Caiaphas restored order, and proceeded to question the man.

"What wouldest thou?" he demanded sharply.

Again Judas glanced about with a frightened look. Licking his lips and rubbing his hands nervously he began hesitatingly:

"What shall ye give me?" But overcome by some fear or emotion he stopped.

"Proceed," cried the High Priest.

Judas began again at the command.

"What will ye give me, and I shall deliver unto you Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Had the very floor beneath their feet opened and swallowed them the councillors could not have been more surprised than they were upon hearing these words of the apostle.

The High Priest was so astounded that he bade the man repeat the statement. When the latter had done so and the Pontiff was convinced that he had not misunderstood he looked long and questioningly upon the speaker.

Was this some new plan whereby the Carpenter sought to heap odium upon the Sanhedrin, Caiaphas asked himself? Was this disciple of the Lord here to ensnare the councillors? Was he playing some game of deceit or had he turned traitor to the Christ?

The High Priest and the members of the council were sorely puzzled and they engaged in a warm discussion concerning the visitor. Had they been sure that he was acting falsely with them they would have dragged him to death. On the other hand, they argued that there was the possibility that he had broken defi-

nitely with Jesus and in that case he was most welcome in their midst, since they could use him in capturing his former Master.

Whilst the assembly thus disputed, Judas stood alone in the center of the chamber shifting nervously from one foot to the other in fear of this august body of which he had often heard. It had required a great deal of courage even to come here, and more than once he had been tempted to turn back. But he had been so intent upon performing what he had set out to do that he had come in spite of all danger. But now as he stood waiting for an answer he almost regretted having done so. He glanced at Caiaphas, but that dignitary was talking excitedly with a group of others whom Judas decided must be men of importance. Everybody in the room was talking and wildly gesticulating so that the Judean inferred that they were engaged in an argument.

Suddenly the High Priest turning addressed him: "What hath brought thee hither to us?" he asked. "Hast thou deserted the ranks of the Christ?"

"Aye," replied the apostle, "I am no longer His disciple."

"Art thou speaking the truth?" bellowed the Pontiff. "Remember that if thou seekest to deceive us we shall kill thee."

"I speak the truth," answered the frightened traitor.

"And art thou ready to deliver thy Master unto us?" questioned the Priest.

"Aye," said Judas, "and what will ye give me?"

The councillors, who had cheered with joy when they heard the traitor's pledge to deliver Jesus unto them, now engaged in a discussion of what they would pay this agent. Finally a figure was decided.

"We shall give thee thirty pieces of silver," said Caiaphas, turning to the man awaiting an answer.

"Thirty pieces of silver," said the latter, "but it is not much. Surely my work is worth more than that. Give me fifty."

"Nay," shouted the other, "thirty is the price. Take it and deliver Him unto us."

"But—" began the traitor.

"Silence, thou miserable wretch," screamed Caiaphas. "Dare not to dispute with me. I said thou wouldst have thirty pieces of silver. I have finished. Gazar, pay the man the amount."

Judas said no more and thereupon the Sadducee counted out the allotted shekels. The traitor pocketed them greedily and turned to leave.

"Hold," cried the High Priest, "remember if thou seekest to play us false we shall surely kill thee."

"I shall not fail," Judas assured them, "ye shall hear from me again before many hours have passed."

So saying, the unfaithful disciple left the chamber.

What motive prompted him to betray his Master no one can tell. Was it through avarice? Hardly, for the amount he obtained for his perfidy was only a little over eighteen dollars of our money. Was it through jealousy? Who can ever know his heart? But at all events when he left the High Priest's castle, and went out into the blackness of the night he was fully determined to deliver Jesus into the hands of the enemy.

The Sanhedrin celebrated the victory with much jubilation after the stranger's departure, for everything now pointed to their having Jesus in their power before the Passover.

Meanwhile out on the lonely hillsides of Mount Olivet the Son of Man conversed with His apostles.

The pale moonlight revealed His white-clothed Figure surrounded by the little band of devoted followers which had accompanied Him for the past three years. But tonight the Master's heart was heavy as He gazed upon them. For there were only eleven. One was missing—Judas—who at that very moment was conspiring with His enemies.

Two days later this man betrayed the Christ.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ENAN

LATE on the afternoon of the first Holy Thursday, or as it was known to the Jews the eve of the Passover, Donatus sat with his wife and daughter on a stone bench upon the terrace at the top of his castle.

Both ladies were dressed in long outer robes usually worn by the better classes when travelling or driving. Thus from their appearance one would conclude that the women were either on the point of going out or had just come in. But one's mind was quickly set at ease on the score, for the general, turning to his companions, asked in a kindly manner:

"Had ye better not use the larger equipage?"

"Nay," returned Gratiana, "I think the smaller one will meet our needs, for it will be less trouble to guide it through the narrow streets which will be crowded at this hour."

"Shall ye take but the one servant who will drive the conveyance?"

"I think that one will be sufficient, since we are going merely for a little trot before the night cometh. The driver will take care of us."

"But I am not desirous for you to go abroad unaccompanied at this time, when there is such an influx of strangers in the city. True, the streets and the principal squares of the metropolis are heavily pa-

trolled and guarded, but even so I shall be uneasy until ye return. I would go with you myself were I free to do so, but I must return to the Fortress before sundown, and it is nearing the hour now. Faustinus would gladly take his place beside you, I am sure, but he is detained at the Praetorium."

"Be not so concerned for our safety, father dear," said Aureliana sweetly. "We shall return without mishap. We are accustomed to go abroad very often. Why art thou so anxious today?"

"Because, my child, at sundown the great Jewish festival of the Passover will begin, and these hours directly preceding its commencement will see the Hebrews much excited, when they might perhaps perform some act hostile to such as are Romans. And thou art so dear to me that I would not wish thee to run a risk of being injured."

"Fear not, father," replied the blind girl, "we shall be careful. No harm will befall us."

"Nay," added Gratiana, "we shall enjoy a pleasant drive in the open chariot after the oppressive heat of the day."

"As ye say then, my dears," replied the commander, "but had ye better not order the servants to prepare the carriage?"

"We have given the necessary instructions," rejoined his wife. "The slaves will summon us when all is ready."

As she finished the words an Ethiopian appeared at the head of the staircase, and bowing, announced politely that the chariot awaited below at the portal. Then salaaming again he descended.

Donatus and Gratiana arising led their blind daughter to the marble steps, and together with her, went

to the courtyard beneath, where the driver expected them.

Aureliana, followed by Gratiana, entered the vehicle, and the servant, climbing up on a raised seat at the back, took the reins into his hands, and in a moment the travellers had moved off waving affectionate farewells to the General.

The latter watched the conveyance until it was out of sight.

It was a four-wheeled open carriage much after the style of the barouche of a few years ago. Drawn by two white horses draped in purple and gold, it was of a size convenient to accommodate two people comfortably, a seat being provided in the back for the driver. This type of vehicle was often used by the wealthy in their pleasure drives about the city and in Rome whence the custom had come.

"Whither would ye go, my ladies?" asked the slave deferentially.

"Whither?" interrogated the mother, turning to Aureliana. "Choose thou, for 'tis only a pleasure drive we seek and the direction is of little consequence."

The blind girl hesitated a moment before answering. She would like to go near to the Temple, she told herself; for, perhaps, she might hear the crowds cheering Jesus as Rebecca had told her they had done a few days ago. Maybe, too, if she came near to the Jewish Shrine, the Christ might see her; and, perhaps, in some manner make her His child as Johanan had promised. So she would ask her mother to go that way and the latter would never know the reason for her request.

"In the direction of the Temple, mother dear," she said, "let us drive towards the Bridge. It is always cool there."

"Very well," said the mother, pleased and, there-

upon she gave instructions to the driver who turned the horses' heads southeasterly on Mount Moriah.

Aureliana sat back in the carriage and was silent for a long time whilst they rolled along at a fairly moderate speed over the smooth Roman highway which the Imperial Governor had constructed upon taking over the mastery of Judea.

She was lost in thought. Her mind was occupied with the events of the past few days: of the entrance of Jesus into the city and the welcome given to Him. Again and again she turned over in her mind all that Rebecca had told her concerning Him.

Where was the Master now, she wondered. Her Hebrew servant had told her that for the last couple of days—indeed since Jesus had branded the Pharisees as hypocrites—He had not been seen in public.

Was he preparing some new move, she asked herself, in keeping with His triumphal entry as a King into the city just a few days ago?

Certainly these Hebrews one and all were a peculiar race, she decided.

One would have expected that after the wonderful demonstration of the beginning of the week the Master would have followed up His success by gathering the masses more closely about Him and strengthening His hold upon them. But, on the contrary, He had withdrawn from the public eye and had not been seen by the people so that the latter were murmuring disappointedly.

The populace had been looking forward to some action on the part of their King by which He would show His power. But, the girl mused, strange to say the Christ had made no such move apart from His royal entrance to the Capital. Well, probably He

knew best, yet she did not blame the Jews for being impatient.

"The breeze is pleasant, my child," said the Lady Gratiana, beside her in the coach.

"Aye, mother, it is refreshing after the day," answered the girl; and the former, seeing that her daughter was not in a talkative mood, said nothing further.

What were the older woman's thoughts? One wonders. Was she dreaming of still more wealth and riches? Was she thinking of the day when, returning unto the Imperial City, her husband would be loaded with honors in recognition of his services in this Judean province? Was she thinking, perhaps, of her afflicted child, or did not the scene through which she was passing direct her thoughts towards the Jewish celebration and to the Wonder Worker, Jesus, of whom Faustinus had spoken to her?

Whatever may have been her musings, she kept them to herself, as the horses trotted gaily over the well-paved road. But she could not help noticing the great activity everywhere apparent at this hour.

It was, as we have said, the eve of the Passover. Now, the Jewish festival proper falling on the morrow, its celebration began at sundown of the preceding day; that is, on the evening of Thursday.

At that hour every family in Israel, clothed as for a journey with staff and cloak, would gather about the table and eat of the Paschal Lamb in memory of that other journey centuries before when the Chosen Children had quitted Egypt to find the Promised Land.

The Passover was to the Jews (and it is even to this day) the principal festival of the year for which elaborate preparations were made.

During the remaining hours, before the feast itself

began, the streets were crowded with people making final arrangements or looking after details which had been overlooked.

Even the streets in the section of the city upon Moriah were filled with great numbers of people hurrying in all directions, each one of the teeming multitude bent upon his own particular errand.

The Lady Gratiana, looking interestedly upon the motley throngs, smiled amusedly at the picture they presented in their multi-colored garments, and with a little gesture drew her own silk cloak more closely about her, as though she feared to be contaminated by this vulgar herd in the highway.

The streets being narrow, the driver had much difficulty in guiding the carriage because of the congestion, and at times was obliged to slow the animals' pace to a walk. More than once Gratiana regretted not having taken the larger vehicle, for then horsemen going in advance would have made a passage for the equipage to pass.

Aureliana, reclining peacefully, was paying no heed to the chattering masses. She was still thinking of Jesus, and she was wondering how Johanan's words would be fulfilled. She recalled them again: 'Jesus will one day repay thee for thy kindness.' Now, how would the Christ recompense her, she mused? Would He enable her to become a follower of Jehovah? It was that which she longed for with all her soul, and if He were a prophet no doubt He could do it. Or would He meet her face to face and speak with her? That, too, would be pleasant. But, she remembered, she could not see Him because she was blind. Well, she would keep on hoping, she concluded, and some day her patience would be rewarded.

Then her thoughts turned upon her father. He was

so good and he loved her so much. Just today he had told her all his plans for the ball he was to give in her honor upon their return to Caesara after the Jewish Passover celebrations. At this ball he would make public announcement of her approaching marriage to Faustinus.

She smiled happily at the remembrance of other court functions held in the seat of Roman authority just a few miles from Jerusalem.

She was sure that this feast in her honor would be the equal of any ever held in the city. Her father would see to that. Of course, she would not be able to appreciate all the beautiful decorations and the wonderful spectacle which would be presented because she was blind, but her father would describe each thing in detail to her and she would know all about everything just as though she could see.

She must have her lady-in-waiting procure a beautiful new gown, she told herself, for even though she herself were blind she must look as well as possible. Folks would expect that, and she felt she owed it to her father and her lover.

Dear Faustinus! What was he doing now, she began to ask herself. Was he thinking of her? No doubt he was, for he said he thought of her always. Now that of course was exaggerated, she knew, but still she felt certain that she did occupy his thoughts when he was separated from her.

She stopped short in her musings.

"Mother, what a dreadful travelling companion I am," she said, "I have hardly spoken a word since we started."

"Thou wert in a pensive mood, my child," answered the mother kindly.

"Aye, it is so peaceful at this hour that I fell to

thinking and did not realize how long I had been silent."

Whereupon the two women entered into a conversation of interest only to themselves, such as all members of the fair sex indulge in, in every age and clime.

Whilst the mother and her child are thus engaged, let us turn our attention to Donatus, where we left him at the castle, after the women had departed from him.

For a while he reclined upon the bench, his eyes fixed upon the city stretching away on every side. Then his gaze fell upon the Temple, and before he knew it he was reviewing the events of a few days ago, the first Palm Sunday, and was thinking again of Jesus as he had done already many times since that memorable meeting with the Master near the Temple gates.

Who was this Man, he wondered? No doubt He was held in high esteem by the people since they had given Him such a hearty welcome. On the other hand, just before the cohort had gone forth to take his place on the highway, he remembered that Faustinus had come to him and told him that the Christ was a desperado and a revolutionary who sought to incite sedition against the Empire.

"Well," thought the Commander, "He is a peculiar type of rebel, and if He continueth thus He will not make much headway towards destroying Rome."

The officer went over and over again in detail all that he had seen on that afternoon of the procession. The crowds, the cheering, the orderly filing of the immense multitudes, and last of all but by no means the least, the Carpenter Himself.

Strange, he mused, that he could not get the face of the Man out of his memory. He had seen it in fancy every day since the meeting. Well, at all events, it was not the countenance of a gang leader or of a crimi-

nal. Surely Faustinus must have misunderstood regarding this Man. He would call Rebecca. She would know more about Jesus than did his daughter's lover.

Going to the landing he touched a silver bell. In a moment a black slave appeared from below.

"Send the Hebrew woman, Rebecca, to me," he ordered.

Then he went back to the bench.

In another moment the Jewess presented herself before him.

"Rebecca," he said, "I have a strange question to put to thee."

The servant said nothing.

"Tell me who is Jesus whom the Jewish people welcomed to the city with such demonstrations just shortly since?"

The woman glanced at him with a frightened look, as a terrible suspicion crossed her mind. Had he, perhaps, found out in some manner that his daughter, the Lady Aureliana, believed in the Christ, and was seeking to have the information confirmed? And if he learned the truth, did he intend to punish her mistress? The Hebrew decided she would not tell him. She would not endanger the blind girl by supplying any information which might be detrimental to her interests.

"Let the general punish me," said Rebecca to herself, "let him even whip me for being discourteous in refusing to answer his question. I shall cheerfully take the chastisement, but I shall say nothing which may involve my mistress in any trouble."

So the moments passed and Donatus waited in vain for the servant to reply to his query.

He glanced sharply at her. She was standing there before him, her hands clasped upon her breast, her eyes downcast.

The man was at a loss to account for her attitude. She was not defiant, but rather she gave the appearance of undergoing some mental torture.

"Rebecca, didst thou hear my question? Why dost thou not answer me?"

Still the girl did not speak.

Now Donatus, though a soldier, was kind, nor seldom lost patience with others. So the woman's apparent obstinacy did not anger him. Instead, he said gently:

"What is it, Rebecca? Confide in me. I am thy friend as well as thy master, and I shall try to help thee, for I see thou art suffering."

This was indeed a condescending manner for a master to use in addressing his servant, and the general's making use of it showed the nobility of soul of the man. Was it any wonder that Aureliana had such a beautiful character, when her father possessed such sterling qualities.

"Dost thou command me to answer, my lord?" she asked timidly.

Donatus was surprised at the emotion displayed by the other.

"Nay, I do not command thee," he replied, "I am asking thee."

"Forgive me, my lord," went on the woman, "but"—she stopped, unable to proceed.

The general, noting her difficulty, said kindly:

"Thou dost not wish to speak of Jesus to me?"

Then the truth flashing suddenly upon him, he added quickly:

"Perhaps thou thinkest that I wish to do Him harm."

The Hebrew did not answer, but he could see by her

expression that he had hit upon the meaning of her strange conduct.

"Have no fear," he assured her, "I do not mean to injure Him. I am interested in Him since that day He entered the city as a King, and not knowing to whom else to go to learn more of Him, I thought of thee. But I contemplate no evil towards the Christ."

The girl's mind was set at rest by her master's words. (She knew he would not deceive her, for he was the very soul of honor.) She therefore replied slowly:

"With pleasure, then, my lord, I shall tell thee of Him. What wouldest thou know, my master?"

"He is called a Wonder Worker, Rebecca. Why?"

"Because He hath done what ordinary man cannot accomplish, things which they only do who are god-like."

"What things, Rebecca?"

"He hath made the blind to see, the dumb to talk, the lame to walk, and even the dead to live again."

Now the general had been in Judea some five years, but had never mingled in circles where the deeds of the Christ had been discussed. Hence the woman's words surprised him greatly, for never before had he heard such marvellous deeds attributed to any but such as were regarded as gods.

"But surely, Rebecca," he replied, "surely, there is some mistake. Thy people, fired with an exaggerated religious zeal, have imagined these things."

"Nay, my lord," quoth the other, "just shortly since, He raised Lazarus of Bethany from the dead. That accounted partly for the reception given to the Christ a few days ago."

"Raised Lazarus from the dead!" mused the man

aloud. "But none before hath ever done such a deed. The dead do not live again."

"But, my lord, he who was brought back to life took part in the procession just a few days ago and he was seen by many."

The general said nothing. But a great fear came upon him. The Romans were a superstitious people and living amongst the Hebrews had not helped Donatus to think less of omens or deeds which were to be attributed to the gods.

He had always dreaded the uncanny powers seemingly possessed by the Jews, but he was actually startled by hearing that One of their number had raised a man from the dead. He assured himself that he would be glad to quit this land to return to Rome, for here in Judea one never knew what spell these Israelites might cast upon one.

"Rebecca," he questioned, "do thy people call this Man a god?"

"Some of the populace believe in Him whilst others are opposed to Him."

Well, there was some consolation at least, reflected the man, in knowing that the whole nation did not worship this so-called Wonder Worker. It showed that His works were of a questionable character and, perhaps, were falsely exaggerated. Still, he himself had seen the Man, and there was about Him a look of commanding importance which would cause the most casual observer to cast a second look at Him.

After all, Jesus was a Hebrew, Donatus reflected, and so did not concern the Romans. His curiosity was satisfied now. He would dismiss Rebecca and put from mind all thoughts of the Christ.

"Thank thee, Rebecca, thou mayst go now," he said kindly, addressing the servant.

The latter bowed and in a moment had descended the stairs.

Left alone again, the General tried to think of other things, and though he succeeded in some measure, still his mind would come back of its own accord to the Wonder Worker, and he would see the Man's holy Face in fancy before him again as he had seen it the day of the march.

Thus Donatus remained musing until a trumpet call rang out below, at the sound of which he quickly arose.

"The time hath passed without my noticing it," he spoke aloud. "I must repair to the Fortress. My wife and daughter are not yet returned, and it is growing late."

He adjusted his scabbard, arranged his long red mantle and his golden helmet and walked along the terrace in the direction of the stairs.

"I trust no harm hath befallen Gratiana, and our child," he said as he reached the marble steps.

Then he descended, and mounting his charger waiting for him at the portal in the courtyard below, rode off in the direction of Antonia.

Whilst Donatus had been conversing with Rebecca concerning the Christ, the carriage bearing Gratiana and Aureliana had begun the return journey to the castle.

A silence had fallen between the two occupants of the coach and each of them reclined amongst the cushions lost in thought.

The horses were moving very slowly, for the crowds in the streets were great, obliging the driver to use the greatest caution in guiding the animals.

Both of the latter were, however, reliable creatures,

so that the servant on the seat in the back held the reins lightly, letting the horses make their way peacefully along whilst he gazed from time to time upon the interesting sights in the thronged highways.

It was at one of those moments when he was looking about him, and hence not paying much attention to the carriage, that an old Israelite engaged in earnest conversation with a friend and not noticing the approach of the chariot stumbled, falling almost under the horses' hoofs.

The animals reared and plunged and though the driver tried to check the beasts his efforts were of no avail. The frightened horses became unmanageable and swerving to one side upset the conveyance.

In turning aside they had fortunately cleared the pedestrian whose falling had caused the accident, but the occupants of the coach were in great danger.

Some Roman soldiers on patrol duty in the streets, happening to be near the scene of the accident, quickly mastered the steeds which were kicking wildly where they had fallen in a heap when the chariot had overturned.

The driver had leaped to safety and Gratiana, foreseeing possible trouble when the animals had plunged, had screamed to Aureliana, at the same moment jumping from the carriage just before it had come to grief.

But Aureliana, blind as she was, could do nothing to save herself, though a frightened shriek escaped her. She felt herself being hurled forward in the darkness. Then she knew no more, for she had fainted.

When she again became conscious she heard the voices of a great crowd about her and her mother was speaking to her in a solicitous tone:

"How art thou now, my darling? We feared that thou wert killed, thou wert so still and pale."

For a moment Aureliana was too dazed to speak. Then she ventured timidly:

"What happened, mother dear?"

"We had an accident, my child," answered the other.

"Art thou injured, my mother?" asked the girl anxiously.

"Nay, indeed. Fortunately no one hath been hurt," said the older woman, "but we were alarmed because thou didst faint."

"It is one of my bad habits," laughed Aureliana. "But I am sure there was no danger."

"Thou wert in grave danger, my dear," answered her mother.

"Grave danger, mother?"

"Aye, dear, thou wert pinned beneath the carriage after it had overturned. The horses were in a heap upon the ground before even the soldiers had come. If the animals had suddenly leaped forward they would have dragged the chariot with them and thou wouldest have been crushed to death."

A shudder passed over the girl at her mother's words.

"I was favored then indeed to have been saved. Who extricated me, my mother? Was it thou?"

"Nay indeed, Aureliana, it was a chance passer-by who, seeing thy danger, risked his own life and throwing himself in the midst of the wreckage lifted thee to safety."

"Who was the person, mother, who did so brave a deed? My father will surely reward him."

"He was an Israelite, my child. The bystanders said that he was a beggar. They called him Enan. After he rescued thee he left at once and was lost amongst the crowds."

"Enan!" exclaimed the girl slowly, "Enan."

"Aye, my child," said the mother, "that was the name the people called him, Enan the beggar."

Aureliana said nothing further.

Presently the carriage was righted with the help of the soldiers who had come upon the scene. The horses were harnessed again and the ladies entering the coach were driven directly to the castle.

Once or twice during the return to their home the mother sought to engage her child in conversation. But noting from the latter's mood that she was not inclined to talk, the older woman made no further attempts, so that the drive was continued in silence.

Aureliana was pondering over the events of the afternoon—the accident, and her rescue by Enan, the beggar.

Yes, she told herself over and over again, that was the name of the mendicant to whom she had given the bracelet that day in the Temple. Enan was the name he had given her when she had asked who he was. And Rebecca had told her just a few days ago, she remembered now, that the news had been spread abroad amongst the Hebrews that a beautiful Roman lady had given a bracelet as an alms to a beggar whom they knew as Enan.

So Johanan's words had come true, she reflected. He had promised that the God of the Hebrews would repay the act she had done in His name. Well, He had done so, He had saved her life through the instrumentality of the very one to whom she had given her bracelet.

Yes, Jehovah had rewarded her and she was thankful. But still she was disappointed, too. She had hoped that He would repay her by making her one of His own in some manner. Now He had fulfilled His obligation, as it were, towards her, and she might not

hope for further kindness from Him since she was not an Israelite. She could not help feeling a little downcast, even in spite of her joy in being saved from certain death. Enan deserved a great reward, and she would speak to her father about the beggar, she concluded.

In a few moments the carriage was at the portal of the castle and the women alighted. Aureliana, after having assured her mother that she was not injured, retired at once to her chamber with the assistance of her maids.

She dismissed these latter, upon reaching her room, and feeling her way to the silken couch which served her as a bed, she threw herself upon her knees beside it. Then, raising her voice, she prayed aloud:

"Great Jehovah, God of the Hebrews, Lord of Truth and Love, I adore Thee. Not many days ago I forswore the Roman gods that I might serve but Thee, and Jesus Christ who is Thy prophet. Once I did a trivial favor in Thy name, O God, and Thy servant Johanan promised that Thou wouldest repay me. Today that promise hath been redeemed, for through Enan the beggar, whom I befriended, Thou hast saved my life. For this, O God of Love, I thank Thee. Often have I heard from my Hebrew servant the stories of the wondrous miracles done by Jesus in Thy name whereby the populace see Thy power manifested. And did I crave a proof that Thou art the mighty God, what greater one could I have than Thine act today of answering Johanan's prayer for me by snatching me from certain death? Once again I cry aloud that I believe in Thee alone and renounce all other deities for Thy sake."

She paused a moment.

"But wilt Thou be angry, O my God, if I tell Thee

that though I am deeply grateful for Thy kindness to me I am yet a little disappointed? I had hoped that Johanan's words would be fulfilled in quite another manner. I yearned so much to serve Thee as one of Thine own children that I had persuaded myself Thou wouldest in some way known only to Thyself reward me by making me Thy child. How I have pined to hear the voice of Jesus. But now I must relinquish all thought of any payment save that which Thou hast given to me. Johanan's promise hath been accomplished and I am left still unhappily craving for Thee. Yet I shall try to serve Thee in my own poor way. I know not how I may please Thee best, for there is none to show me; but I shall do what my heart will prompt and trust in Thy goodness to accept my homage."

When she had finished the words she fell forward upon the bed and a great storm of weeping passed over her.

She remained thus for a long while, her entire being the prey of an insufferable agony. She gave way to all the pent-up sufferings of her years of blindness. She lived again the dreary hours, the painful misery of her imprisonment since the day she had become sightless. Then into the soul of this girl who strove so earnestly to love God, there rushed a torrent of the most frightful temptations, a scourge sent by Satan to try her.

In the darkness of her chamber, disappointed and disheartened, Aureliana rebelled against her fate and cried against the cruelty of the God whom she had endeavored to serve.

If this Hebrew God could do all things, why had He not guided her destiny so that she might see again? Was it not better to be dead than to be blind, she asked herself, in the depths of despair? Why did not Jesus

come and cure her if He had wished to really repay her?

Meeting the onslaughts of the enemy with every means she knew, the poor pagan sufferer battled valiantly to keep her heart loyal to the Master.

At length she cried out:

"O God of Israel, Jehovah, God of the Hebrews, help me, help me. Where is that peace which I expected that Thou wouldest give to me? Hast Thou abandoned me?"

No answering voice came to soothe her troubled spirit. No heavenly power flooded her soul with courage to withstand the devil's attacks. She was left to fight the battle alone. The struggle went on and on, until at last she threw herself upon the couch in a state of doubt and despair.

Out in the darkness of Gethsemane Another also endured an agony. He too was seemingly abandoned by Heaven.

But the Roman girl had no way of knowing that she was being tried as chosen souls have always been. She did not know that during the very hours that her spirit was afflicted, Jesus Christ was also on the verge of collapse in the Garden of Olivet.

She was only aware that she was losing her grip upon her belief in the Master, and was sinking deeper and deeper in a black gulf whose waters must soon close over her—the gulf of despair.

## CHAPTER XIV

### SO AS BY FIRE

AURELIANA slept little that night, for her mind was too filled with the terrible doubts which assailed her.

The hours dragged by slowly and still the sufferer writhed in the agony of blackest despair.

Over and over again she tried to dispel the thoughts which crowded upon her brain; but it was useless, they would not leave her.

She tried to remember how long she had been lying in this state of mental torture. It was early, she recalled, when she had retired. Her mother had come to her room to speak with her and had remained a while. But to the distracted maiden that seemed ages ago now.

Gradually all sounds in the castle had ceased; the streets and highway had become quiet, and a death-like silence had descended upon the place; but still the girl on the silken bed groaned in the twofold darkness surrounding her—the blindness which destroyed her vision, and the blackness of despair which strove so hard to kill her soul.

O, the awful doubts and misgivings that tore her!

Why had this Hebrew God saved her life? Was it because He was cruel, and had rescued her from danger only to plunge her back again into the awful misery of blindness? It had been ridiculous for her

ever to have believed in Him. Did He not delight in making others suffer? Had He not kept the Israelites in constant suspense for thousands of years? Rebecca had told her that. Had not Jehovah called the Jews His Chosen People and then made sport of them by making them slaves during the Egyptian bondage? Surely that was cruelty! Now the Hebrews were minions of Rome. What was that but cruelty? Surely if this so-called God had any love for His people He would not have made them suffer so, the despairing girl decided.

Oh, she had been a fool ever to have listened to Rebecca's prattle concerning the Jewish God. The Roman gods promised at least earthly happiness and gaiety. Paganism bade one enjoy the present, to live for the hour. It did not concern itself with a nebulous contentment in the future. It did not dangle sweetness before one's eyes only to draw the boon away when one would seek to snatch it. The Roman cult may indeed have its shortcomings, but surely it was not based on cruelty as was the Jewish religion. These Israelites prated continually of sacrifice. They talked of giving up what one most loved. Her very soul now cried out against such folly. How had she ever imagined that she could adore Jehovah! She had been hasty in praying to Him. She had been overwrought by hearing so much from Rebecca concerning Christ. She had been led astray by the Hebrew woman and had even believed in miracles. Her mother had called these things magician's tricks, and the distracted girl decided that her parent was right. Think of renouncing the Roman deities for such a cruel God as that of the Israelites! She decided she would offer incense to Diana in the morning to atone for her former infidelity.

The Jews were a simple lot, she reflected, for hav-

ing listened to Jesus. The very idea of a Carpenter becoming a King was absurd and she wondered at her own credulity in having been so easily led by Rebecca's nonsense. She would think no more of Him, and would forbid her servant ever mentioning His name again in her presence. She was through with Him. Henceforth she would become more faithful to the Roman gods, which would give her at least some temporary happiness.

After all, was it not her duty to pay homage to her country's gods, and not to the Deity of a conquered nation? She reminded herself that she owed it as a sacred obligation to her parents and her lover to be loyal always to Rome. She must never allow Faustinus to know that she had swerved for an instant in her devotion to the idols of the Imperial City!

Faustinus! Ah! there was a man! No religious fanatic preaching sacrifice, but a real human being who strove to make her happy! If she followed him she would know contentment. If she were fool enough to listen to the teachings of Jesus, she would have the misery and discontent which sacrifice would bring. If she had to choose between Jesus and Faustinus, she was certain that she would not hesitate to take the latter.

Christ! A Dreamer, a Visionary, One who sought to lead the poor misguided masses farther away from happiness. Rebecca said the rulers hated Him. She knew Faustinus loathed Him. Was it any wonder? She told herself now in her despair that she hated the very name of Christ and would even rejoice at His capture by His enemies. For had He not been the cause of her suffering much more intensely than ever, since she had been foolish enough to have thought of Him?

Thus for hours did the lonely sufferer on the couch

endure the mental torture of despair. Gone were the hopes which for a few days had filled her. No longer did her heart beat faster with the conviction that Jehovah through Jesus would bring her lasting happiness. She could not have prayed now as she had done upon entering her chamber after returning from the accident. It would be a mockery now to offer a prayer she convinced herself, for she did not believe any longer in the Hebrew God.

In that pall of black despair which had come upon the girl's soul there was no speck of light, no gleam of hope. All was dark, dark.

"Oh, if only I could die and end this misery which I am enduring," she groaned. "Is there no one who can save me? Is there no being greater than myself? Is there none can bring me comfort? Must this awful torture lash my soul unceasingly? Why was I made to crave happiness, why was my heart made to pine for contentment, if there is nothing that can satisfy my yearnings? O cruel fates, O mockery of the gods, I crave for bliss unending and yet it is denied me."

Wearyed at last by her mental sufferings, she fell asleep just as the day was breaking; although, of course, she could not see the silver dawn stealing into her chamber.

It was a troubled sleep, for she dreamed much, seeing Rebecca and Faustinus, her parents and many others, and last of all Jesus Himself, all mingled in such a manner as to be unintelligible to her.

But at last the others all faded away and left only the Christ.

She thought she could see Him as she had depicted Him in fancy just a few days ago. His face was calm and beautiful as it was on that other occasion when she had seen Him, as she had slept. His spotless white

robe hung gracefully about His god-like form. His hair fell full upon His shoulders.

Forgetful of the bitterness she had felt towards Him when she had writhed in her agony, Aureliana now gazed lovingly upon Him in her dream. But even as she looked, behold a wondrous change took place in the appearance of the Master! Slowly the look of peace on His holy countenance changed to one of suffering and pain. His immaculate garb became red as though stained with blood. A crown of thorns rested on His brow and blood flowed freely from many wounds in His body. He held out His hands to her and she was horrified to note that they were pierced as though by nails.

Even in her dreaming she felt a great wave of pity surging through her body at the sight of the misery of the Christ. Could this be the same Man who had entered Jerusalem as a King? What had happened? Knowing as she did the meaning of suffering, her womanly heart went out to this Companion in affliction and she felt as though she would like to help Him. She tried to stretch out her hand to touch Him and bring Him some relief, but a great gulf separated Him from her, she found, and she could not bridge it. So being powerless to aid Him she spoke to Him instead.

"What is it, Lord, that maketh Thee to suffer so?" she asked.

"I suffer for mankind," replied the blood-stained Figure.

"But why, Lord?"

"That through My sufferings and pains man may come to God and Glory Eternal," slowly answered the Christ.

"But why, Lord, must Thou undergo such agony? Is there no other way to bring mankind to God?"

The eyes of the Master gazed long and lovingly upon the girl, and even in her sleep the latter could feel that look burning into her very soul.

Then slowly the Voice of the Saviour inquired pleadingly:

"Hast thou forgotten Calvary's Road? It leadeth to God and Glory Eternal. But only by sacrifice and suffering may one walk that path. For to love God is to serve, and to serve is to sacrifice one's self."

Then the Master was gone from her dream and she was alone again. But she knew the meaning of the words which she had heard:

"Through sufferings we must walk on Calvary's Road, which leadeth to God and Glory Eternal."

These she had heard on that other day when she had fallen into a sleep and seen the vision of the Lord, who had spoken to her.

But today He had added more!

'To love God is to serve, and service is sacrifice.'

Ah, now she knew what the words signified, she told herself.

True love of God meant to serve Him, even to suffer for Him, for happiness consisted in suffering, of giving up one's own will for the sake of God!

She had not really loved God before, she decided, for she had thought too much of herself. She had not accepted her sufferings with the right intention. The bliss she sought, for which her soul pined, was to be found only in Heaven with God. On earth, one must prepare for it by enduring afflictions patiently.

Perhaps God wanted her to be supremely happy in Heaven, so He was trying her on earth. He was asking her to walk on 'Calvary's Road.' She would be assiduous in guiding her steps on that path, she concluded. And with the decision a great load was sud-

denly lifted from her and she felt free and bright again. All the agony she had endured had now disappeared. The rebellion in her heart had died. Then in her dream she saw the Christ appear once again.

But this time His face was not torn and bleeding; rather it shone with a light so dazzling in its brilliancy that the maiden was obliged to turn her head away.

"Aureliana, my child, thou hast borne thy trial well and I am satisfied with thee," spoke a musical Voice.

"What trial, Lord?" she asked, timidly.

"The agony of despair which was sent to test thee."

"To test me," she repeated wonderingly.

"Aye, my child, for each soul must be purged so as by fire. Thou hast been sorely tried this night. But have patience; suffer just a little longer."

And in her sleep she answered:

"Jesus, forgive me for having been so weak and unfaithful to Thee. I am ready now to suffer all my days for Thy sake, if at the end I may be happy with Thee in possessing Glory Eternal."

She cast one glance at Christ. He smiled at her and answered tenderly:

"Just a little longer."

Then the vision faded slowly and she dreamed no more.

Whilst Aureliana in her castle endured the tortures of temptation, Caiaphas and his followers were assembled in the High Priest's palace on Sion. They had come together to make the final preparations for the capture and death of the Saviour.

Discouraged by the numerous defeats they had sustained at the hands of the Christ, His enemies had been on the point of delaying further action against Him

until after the Pasch. But the coming of Judas with his offer of betrayal had, as we have seen, completely changed their plans, so that it had been immediately decided to accept the traitor's proposal and put Jesus to death at once.

It was now near the midnight hour. Tomorrow was the Passover and the day following the Great Sabbath.

Earlier in the day Judas had come to Caiaphas with the promise that tonight He would deliver up the Master, and acting on this the High Priest had convened his colleagues to await the moment of victory.

"At what hour will Judas come?" asked Shemaiah.

"Ere long I think," replied the Pontiff, "for it is growing late."

"Can we trust the man?" inquired Caleb.

"Aye," replied Caiaphas, "he is absolutely trustworthy. Thou dost remember that it is now two days since first he came offering his services to us. During the intervening period I have seen him many times, and he is determined to deliver the Nazarene into our hands."

"It is well," cried Gazar. "At last the miserable Carpenter will receive from us his just deserts."

"We have reason to rejoice this night, my friends," added the High Priest, "for we are about to render a service to Jehovah our God, in ridding the nation of a blasphemer who hath sought to bring discredit upon the priesthood of Aaron."

"Verily," assented the others present, "God is with us."

Oh, the hypocrisy of these scribes and Pharisees! They hated the Son of Man because He had exposed their sinful lives. They had determined to kill Him because He had dared to interfere with their schemes for temporary greatness. They called Him a blas-

phemer because He sought to defend the holiness of His Father in Heaven, and yet they had the audacity to invoke with mock piety the very God whose Son they were about to put to death. Was it any wonder that in later days the just judgment of the Lord of Hosts descended in all its fury upon these whited sepulchres, destroying their city and their Temple?

"There can be no failure this time," continued Caiaphas, "Judas will go with us in person and give the Nazarene into our hands."

A murmur of applause greeted this statement for all the occupants of the chamber were sworn enemies of the Master.

"Hath every detail been arranged?" asked Annas, "for should the Carpenter escape this time He would make us the jest of the entire people."

"Everything hath been considered," replied Caiaphas to the deposed High Priest, who was also his father-in-law. "Our good friend Gazar hath prepared the plans and thou knowest well the efficiency of our esteemed colleague."

The old Sadducee, pleased with the compliment paid to him by his chief, smiled genially as he bowed.

"I have done my utmost to rid my nation of the Disturber," he said.

"And thou dost not think that He may foil us again?" inquired Shemaiah.

"Nay, by the Lord God of my fathers," swore the Sadducee. "I promise that this time we shall take the infamous rascal."

"Tell the brethren of the plans, Gazar," said Caiaphas, "that they may know the procedure to be followed in attaining our victory."

"With pleasure," replied the other, and it was easily

observed that he relished his task of seizing the Christ and enjoyed preparing for it.

"It is now near midnight," he began, "and very soon Judas the ex-apostle will come to us. He will conduct us to the place where Jesus abideth. At this hour the multitudes are within doors and there is little to be feared from them. Ye know well that they are friendly towards the Christ, but now they are safely in their homes and have no knowledge of our intention of taking Jesus. When they become aware of our plans it will be too late for action, for the Carpenter will be in our hands."

A wild outburst of applause actuated by bitter hatred towards the Saviour followed these words, and the speaker both pleased and stimulated by the cheering, continued his discourse.

"I have arranged with Faustinus, the Tribune of Pilate's Bodyguard, to send a detachment of soldiers to accompany us on our mission. In addition I have gathered a goodly band of Temple guards and men whom I have promised to reward for their services. These fellows are equipped with staves and clubs so that should any trouble arise we shall be able to offer a stiff opposition."

Again the occupants applauded the painstaking efforts of their colleague.

"Was Faustinus not angered with thee because of the disappointment caused to the Roman soldiers some days ago when the Nazarene entered the city?" asked Shemaiah.

"Nay," laughed the Sadducee, "he was angry, forsooth, but not with me. He was enraged because the Criminal had not been taken and he swore vengeance upon Him."

The speaker paused a moment then added:

"Have no fear, Faustinus is a loyal friend and ally who will not be content until he hath seen Jesus torn limb from limb."

"Thanks to thy good management," cried Annas.

Gazar bowed and resumed:

"When we have taken the Nazarene we shall conduct Him before the Sanhedrin which shall pronounce His condemnation."

"The Sanhedrin?" shouted many voices. "Did we not have enough trouble with our council at the meeting three weeks ago? Shall we court disaster again by leading Jesus before it?"

Gazar smiled.

"At the meeting whereof ye speak, the full body of members was assembled, the friends of Christ being also present. We shall not repeat the error. This time we shall convene a meeting of His enemies."

"Wise old Gazar!" quoth the crafty Annas. "Thou art a credit to thy nation and the Great Council."

"Faithful servitor of Israel," cried Shemaiah, embracing the Sadducee, whom in his heart he hated.

"I seek to do my duty," replied the latter, feigning a great modesty. "If I can but help to rid my country of this Malefactor I shall be satisfied."

"Thy wish will be gratified," added Caiaphas. "For ere long thou shalt vent thine ire upon Jesus who is called the Christ."

"May the God of my fathers strengthen my right arm that I may blot from Judea's fair face this loathsome Carpenter," prayed the old hypocrite.

A brief silence followed these words. Then Caleb asked:

"Shall we all of us go with Judas to capture the Criminal?"

"Nay," replied Gazar. "My lords, Annas and

Caiaphas, will remain in the palace here to await our return. In our absence they will convoke an assembly of chosen councillors. With these latter, in number sufficient to comply with legal requirements, we shall proceed with the trial of the Prisoner. We shall condemn Him and then conduct Him to Pontius Pilate to have the death sentence ratified. Faustinus hath promised to use his influence to persuade the Governor to execute our designs.

"Then nothing is lacking to insure success?" said Caleb.

"Nothing," replied Gazar. "Ere the Paschal sun hath set Jesus Christ, the Blasphemer, will have died and we shall once more assume our rightful places with the people."

A sigh of relief escaped the lips of the others present in the room. The Sadducee's plan left no room for failure. His astute handling of the situation would put Jesus into their power at last.

The conversation became general and by the gesticulations of the little groups gathered in various parts of the chamber one could easily discern that the members were in great expectation of their approaching victory.

Presently Malchus, the servant of the High Priest, entered the room and proceeded directly to his master.

A great hush fell upon the occupants of the apartment.

"My lord," said Malchus, "Judas awaiteth at the portal."

"Bid him enter at once," barked the Priest.

The attendant bowed and left the room.

A buzzing of voices proclaimed the excitement which prevailed, and the exclamations showed how much these scribes and Pharisees hated the Saviour.

The door opened again and the ex-apostle entered

the hall. He stopped for a moment in confusion at the sight of the assembly. His hands worked nervously, his eyes wandered over the room. Then Caiaphas advanced to meet him and embracing him, said kindly:

"Ah, Judas, our friend, we welcome thee."

The traitor eyed the Pontiff timidly, but said nothing.

"Have no fear of this august body," continued the High Priest, "they are thy friends because thou art a loyal son of Israel, a patriot, a hero who seeketh to do a service to thy nation. Judas, I salute thee as a champion of the people."

The speaker turned to the assembled councillors.

"Do we not acclaim this man, Judas, our friend, as a defender of our homeland, a bulwark of liberty and a lover of peace? Doth he not seek to rid our land of an Impostor and a seditious Teacher, doth he not endeavor to preserve the religion of Jehovah from the contaminating influence of a false Prophet? Tell me, my brethren, tell me in the presence of Judas, what ye have always believed of him, that he is a champion of the people?"

"Aye," rang out a chorus of voices, "aye, Judas is a worthy Israelite, a friend of the multitudes, a hater of evil. We are his friends and will protect him."

Encouraged by the greeting the ex-apostle turned to Caiaphas and said timidly:

"If ye are ready, I shall conduct you to the place where Jesus is now abiding. Ye shall encounter no difficulty in capturing Him."

"But how shall we know Him if there are many there? It may be dark," interrupted Gazar.

Judas hesitated before answering and one could observe on his sallow countenance a look as that of

one who does some deed which deep down in his heart he hates. He presented the appearance of one who forces himself to do a distasteful task which he is obliged to accomplish, once begun.

"I shall accompany you," he rejoined, "and whomsoever I shall kiss that same is He. Seize Him and hold Him fast."

The Sadducee drew Judas aside after this remark and after some further parleys between the two, the former announced that the hour of departure had arrived.

"We shall go directly to the Mount of Olivet" he declared "and I ask you to move cautiously and if possible noiselessly, for we must not disturb the multitudes lest they cause us trouble."

Those present listened with rapt attention to the words.

"I shall ask my lords Annas and Caiaphas to invoke the blessings of God upon our undertaking and in His holy name we shall set out upon our journey."

The two priests nodded in reply and folding their hands upon their breasts raised their eyes piously to Heaven. The bystanders bowed their heads.

"Lord God of Hosts," prayed the Pontiffs, "these go forth to capture Jesus, that by so doing they may serve Thee. Guide them and help them."

The invocation finished Gazar gave the order to descend into the courtyard.

Wrapping their cloaks about them, drawing their hoods well upon their heads, these enemies of Christ began the first stage of their march towards Olivet.

In the court a band of men awaited them. They were the fellows Gazar had pressed into his service. Many of them carried lighted torches and lanterns whose glare illumined the scene, revealing at the fur-

ther side a detachment of Roman soldiers in armor.

"We are ready, men" cried the Sadducee to his minions. "Remember your duty, to capture the Nazarene, to take Him by force if necessary, but under no consideration to allow Him to escape. Should any opposition develop, do not hesitate to draw blood or even to kill. Be faithful and I shall reward you well for your work."

The rabble cheered the man's words and a lusty yell broke forth!

"We shall kill the Impostor, Jesus of Nazareth." Gazar smiled indulgently.

"Noble fellows," he cried.

A Roman officer approached. He wore the costume of a tribune or colonel, over which was thrown a long outer cloak. In a moment he was beside the Sadducee.

"My lord Faustinus!" cried the latter.

"Aye," quoth the newcomer.

"But I did not expect thee," rejoined the other, pleased that the officer had come. "It is more than I could dare to hope that thou wouldest accompany us on our expedition."

"I hate this Jesus Christ so bitterly," answered the colonel, "that I could not rest within my castle when I knew that ye were searching for Him; I decided to accompany the soldiers and go with you. By Bacchus, it will cheer my heart to see this Christ taken and condemned."

"We are privileged indeed to have such a friend as thee," said Gazar.

"Nay, by Jupiter, Jesus must die. He hath sought to thwart the power of Rome."

"This is Judas, a former follower of the Nazarene," quoth the Sadducee, presenting the traitor. "He will assist in taking the Criminal."

"Wise fellow," answered the officer indulgently.

"If thou art prepared we shall depart," said the old councillor. "It is nearly midnight and I am aching to lay my hands upon the Criminal."

"And I as well," said the tribune, wheeling his horse about towards the Roman soldiers at the left of the yard.

"Let us proceed," shouted Gazar. And forthwith the procession moved out of the courtyard into the highway.

## CHAPTER XV

### HAIL, RABBI!

**A**T the time in which Christ lived, the Mount of Olives was one of the most pleasant of the numerous environs of the Holy City.

Situated to the east of the Temple, across the stream of Cedron, in the shadow of Moriah, the mountain was always cool and enticing even on the hottest summer day. Its sloping sides were always green, its countless gardens ever verdant.

Groves of pines and elms stood side by side upon its inclines. Fig trees rose to gigantic heights. Clusters of palms raised their waving plumes aloft. Mammoth cedars and stately cypresses locked their branches overhead forming a leafy canopy to shelter from the sun's rays the richly colored fruits and gorgeous flowers in the orchards below.

It would be hard to imagine a spot of more entrancing beauty than was Olivet in the days of which we write. Nature had strewn it lavishly with her best gifts and made it a place of unequalled splendor.

To its shady retreats and gardens the inhabitants of Jerusalem flocked in great numbers to wander amidst the loveliness of the scene, to enjoy its restful peacefulness or to meditate upon the things of Heaven.

Here, too, Jesus often came to teach the multitudes and on many occasions He passed the night in the silence of the vineyards.

Located on the lower part of the mount was a garden belonging to one of the Master's friends. It is known to tradition as Gethsemane because of an oil press which formerly stood there. During His public career Jesus often retired to this place, with His apostles, to pray and rest.

Thither the Christ repaired on the night of the first Holy Thursday after He had partaken of the Paschal supper as prescribed by Jewish Law, and it was here that He began the Sacred Passion which immediately preceded His death upon the cross for the redemption of mankind.

Entering the garden with His eleven apostles, for Judas had now left Him, He said to them:

"Sit ye here whilst I go yonder to pray."

Taking Peter, James and John He went into the darkest recesses of the place. Then withdrawing from the three chosen ones the distance of a stone's throw, He prayed alone.

The Paschal moon was riding serenely in the cloudless sky above, casting a pale, silvery light upon the earth. Everything was silent for it was growing late.

The world was wrapped in slumber. Man and beast and even nature itself had bowed their heads in sleep and only the Saviour watched alone.

For hours He endured the weight of the sorrow which pressed upon His soul. On His knees with His face to the ground and the sweat-like great drops of blood gathering upon His brow He battled against the awful temptations sent to try Him and, at last, from His tortured spirit went up that cry of uttermost agony:

"Father, if it be possible let this chalice pass from Me."

But no answering voice came back to cheer Him, no

word of consolation was given to help Him in the struggle He was waging against the Evil One. No, the Master suffered on and on, until finally He bent His human will to obey the divine will of the Father.

In the throes of that death struggle Jesus was alone. How much the knowledge of His abandonment must have added to His affliction!

All of us appreciate friendship, and we like to think that we can call upon our intimates in our hour of need. But to Jesus even that privilege was denied. His very apostles slept whilst He agonized. They could not remain awake even after He had thrice aroused them.

How quickly the world forgets! It was only last Sunday that the multitudes had flocked about the Master acclaiming Him as their King. Tonight they had forgotten Him.

From where He prayed He could see across the brook of Cedron the bulk of the city rising in all its greatness. He could descry the countless homes wherein dwelt those who in the hour of His short-lived victory had called themselves His friends. But now they were asleep and He was left to fight alone. Soon His enemies would come to take Him but there would be no one to rally to His defense. He would have to meet His adversaries unaided and defenseless.

Somewhere in the silent city His enemies were plotting to take Him. Amidst the hush of the night He listened for the coming of the traitor, Judas.

At last He saw the flickering lights of torches amongst the trees. He heard the shuffling steps of an approaching band, the whispered sounds of coarse voices, and He knew that the end was nigh.

"Father, if this chalice may not pass except I drink it, Thy will, not Mine, be done," He said.

And forthwith He woke the sleeping apostles.

"The hour is come. Rise up, let us go. Lo, he that betrayeth Me is at hand."

The silence of Gethsemane was rudely broken by the shoutings of the rabble which had scrambled up the mountain sides. Like vultures about to devour their prey they surrounded the Christ. But the latter stood calm and majestic in their midst.

From out that infamous band one man separated himself and coming to Jesus, kissed Him saying:

"Hail, Rabbi!"

It was Judas.

Not all the blows He was yet to endure, not the tortures of the cross itself could wound the Saviour as did that kiss of the traitor. Yet the Master turned to this miserable wretch and said kindly:

"Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Gazar remembered that the kiss had been the sign whereby the ex-apostle would betray the Christ. So now he shouted to his followers:

"Seize the Criminal."

The Roman soldiers had taken up their station near the entrance-gate, and only the Jewish rabble had penetrated within the garden. These latter now rushed upon Jesus at their leader's command.

But the Master did not recoil.

"Whom seek ye?" He asked quietly.

"Jesus of Nazareth," was the answer.

"I am He," replied the Lord.

At the words the assassins fell back, cowed by the look, the voice, the accents in which the Christ had spoken.

"Ye miserable dogs," screamed Gazar, "do ye fear to take the cursed Nazarene? Bind Him, or by the

Lord God of Israel I shall have the Roman soldiers kill you."

Driven to action the ruffians advanced again, and the Saviour held out His arms to them that they might bind Him.

The Sadducee rushed forth and with his own hands secured the Master with a stout rope, and fastened His arms behind Him with cords. By the flickering gleam of the torch which a guard held to light him in the performance of his task, the old hypocrite could see the countenance of Jesus. But although upon that blessed Face there was a look of intense suffering and sorrow, the man's heart was not touched. Instead he brought his own ugly features close to those of his Lord crying out vehemently:

"At last we have Thee, Thou blasphemous Carpenter, Thou traitorous Son of Israel. And, by the God of my fathers, we shall make Thee pay the price of Thy devilish conduct."

"A kingly Carpenter, a Saviour of the people, the Son of David," laughed Shemaiah scornfully as he approached the Master.

"This Man must be made to atone for the odium He hath heaped upon our priesthood," quoth Caleb, the Pharisee.

And several others joined in the torrent of vituperation which was let forth by these enemies of the Christ.

But He made no answer. A great flood of pity and compassion swept over Him as His eyes wandered over that band of miscreants surrounding Him.

In the ruddy glow of the torches and lanterns He could see the scowling countenances of these doers of evil. He could discern the clubs and staves they had brought to beat Him into surrender. He could see the swords concealed beneath their cloaks. Yet these

were His own children. They were not pagans, they were not Romans, they were of the Chosen People whom He had come to save. His heart almost broken with grief, He cried out:

"Ye are come out as it were to a robber with swords and clubs to apprehend Me. I sat daily with you teaching in the Temple and ye laid not hands upon me."

At that moment Faustinus who had been awaiting with the Roman legionaries at the gate approached the group.

"I was impatient," he exclaimed, addressing Gazar. "I came to see if thou hadst taken the Criminal."

"Aye. See we have the wretch," cried the Sadducee exultingly.

The Praetorian officer approached and shaking his gloved fist in the face of the Christ hissed savagely:

"Thou meddling Fool, Traitor to Thy nation, enemy of Rome, I hate Thee. And, by the great Jupiter, Thou shalt die for Thy treason."

The rabble cheered the soldier, but the Master held His peace.

"Bravo, my lord Faustinus," said the oily Sadducee, "thou art truly a patriot worthy of our Mother Rome."

The other smiled, pleased with the Jew's flattery.

"A malefactor is deserving of punishment," he replied. "But we are wasting time; let us take the Prisoner hence."

"Aye," cried the mob, "take Him away."

"To the High Priest's Palace," cried Gazar, dragging Jesus forward by a rope.

The rabble fell in behind, whilst Faustinus rejoined the Imperial soldiers at the gate.

Surrounded by this band, howling in savage glee, pushed and jostled by miserable Temple guards, the Master was led forth as though He were the most

dangerous criminal. For weeks and months, aye years, Gazar and his associates had awaited this hour when the hated Nazarene would be in their power. At last, it had arrived and they could with impunity vent upon Him all their pent-up feelings of anger and revenge.

There was no one to defend Him now; no one to prevent His enemies from accomplishing their fell designs.

The multitudes which had acclaimed Him just a few days ago were now safely within doors asleep. The few friends whom the Saviour counted were unaware of His plight or had withdrawn from Him through fear. Even the very apostles had fled. And Jesus was left alone.

At the entrance to Gethsemane the Roman legionaries fell in beside the Jewish hordes.

Gazar raised his voice in commanding tones and addressed the latter:

"Extinguish your torches and lanterns," he said. "Move cautiously and quietly through the city streets. Make no disturbance lest we arouse the sleeping populace and perhaps precipitate a riot. Would ye have our victory snatched from us now? Would ye have the Carpenter set free?"

And a chorus of coarse voices thundered in reply:

"No, Jesus Christ must die."

"Then obey my orders," he shouted.

The torches and lanterns were dimmed and the whole body made its way silently towards the palace on Sion.

Arrived at the Pontiff's castle Faustinus and the Roman soldiers separated themselves from the mob and returned forthwith to their Fortress. The Praetorian colonel gave Gazar every assurance that he

would use his influence with the Governor to bring about the death of Jesus.

"I know not how to repay thee," said the Sadducee in parting from the officer.

"In no other way than by thy continued loyalty to Rome and her representatives," quoth the latter, "and above all, by condemning this Malefactor."

"Have no fear, my lord," grinned Gazar, "Jesus will be adjudged guilty of His crimes and punished."

At which both men laughed bitterly and the officer quitted his companion.

The latter coming to the Christ dragged Him by a rope into the presence of Annas.

"We have taken the Culprit at last," cried the Sadducee upon entering the presence of the deposed Primate of Jewry, "examine Him, my lord, whilst I communicate with the Sanhedrin."

"Aye," smirked the Pontiff, "and I shall treat our Guest with all consideration until thou returnest."

Gazar laughed uproariously, now that he was safe within the castle where there were no enemies to fear. Approaching the Master who stood bound in the midst of the guards, he said contemptuously:

"Well, we have Thee now in our power, Son of David, King of Israel," and he bowed before Him in mockery.

Then drawing nearer to Jesus so that his face almost touched that of the Master, he leered at Him crying:

"Wretch!" With the words he smote the Christ a blow upon the face.

Jesus bore it meekly uttering no word of protest.

The bystanders cheered. Annas smiled broadly and seated himself upon a dais.

Casting another look of hatred at the Lord and

bowing deferentially to the ex-High Priest, Gazar left the room to complete the assembling of the councillors and to collect false witnesses who would testify against the Prisoner at the official hearing before the Sanhedrin to be held presently.

"Bring the Criminal forward," shouted Annas, and at the command Jesus was pushed roughly to within a few feet of the silken couch whereon His examiner reclined.

"So Thou art Jesus of Nazareth, the King of Israel!" scoffed the Pontiff. "Well it cheereth my heart to gaze upon Thee, for long have I desired to speak with Thee. Thou wouldst destroy the cult of Jehovah, eh? Thou wouldst dare to brand the scribes and priests of the Most High as hypocrites? Thou wouldst set Thyself up as a Leader? Aye, Thou wouldst even go so far as to incite the people against Rome? Jesus Christ, the Carpenter, the Wonder Worker, the King!" he repeated, in derision and the crowd laughed and jeered, following his example.

But the Master said no word in answer.

Then the Primate leaning forward spoke with all the bitterness of his unholy soul.

"Thou scheming hypocrite, Thou devilish upstart," he cried. "Thy course is run, Thou shalt answer for Thy crimes. Tell me who are Thy followers? What is Thy doctrine?"

The mob waited expectantly for the Prisoner's reply. He looked His questioner steadily in the face, as He answered calmly:

"I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple whither all the Jews resort. And in secret I have spoken nothing. Why askest thou Me? Ask them who have heard what

I have spoken unto them. Behold, they know what things I have said."

The face of Annas flushed with rage.

"Thou brazen rascal," he hissed.

One of the mob struck Jesus in the face crying:

"Answerest Thou the High Priest so?"

But the Saviour turning asked simply:

"If I have spoken evil give testimony of the evil.

But if well, why strikest thou Me?"

"Impostor, Traitor, wretched Galilean," called the angry judge, "Thou shalt pay for Thy folly in speaking so to me, for I swear by Jehovah my God that Thou shalt die."

But the Master facing the angry prelate said nothing.

"Lead the Accused forth to the Council Hall," cried the latter; "there the Sanhedrin will pass sentence upon Him."

Saying the words the Pontiff arose and left the room whilst the rabble set upon Jesus like a pack of hungry wolves upon their prey. With much violence they dragged Him from the chamber.

The wing of the palace occupied by Annas was joined by a courtyard to that wherein Caiaphas dwelt. Through this latter the Prisoner was led on the way to the Council Hall where the trial was to be held. As He crossed this yard Christ came face to face with Peter who was at that very moment denying Him.

Just shortly since Judas had betrayed Him. Now Peter swore that he did not even know the Man. Ah, surely the Saviour was friendless!

He cast one look upon the faithless apostle, who on that instant realizing his crime, repented.

Another moment and the Son of Man had passed within the palace to meet His judges.

It was now early morning and after much difficulty a goodly number of the Sanherin councillors had been assembled under the presidency of Caiaphas in whose home they met.

The first streaks of the dawn were beginning to peep into the room through the windows set high up in the walls and the gray light mingling with the yellow flame of the candelabra, cast upon the chamber an unearthly sepulchral glare.

Seated or reclining about the hall were the councillors waiting to pronounce judgment upon their Lord and God.

Wrapped in their flowing cloaks which they had wound closely about them, for it was cold, those men old and gray, with scowling, ugly countenances and piercing eyes, presented the appearance of evil spirits. Caiaphas was there in the first place, deep in conversation with Gazar and a little group of members. Caleb was present, crafty and cunning. Shemaiah too, sensual and pompous. So were all the bitterest enemies of Jesus, who still smarted under the sting of the indictment He had pronounced against them, and who longed for an opportunity of being avenged upon Him.

But conspicuous by their absence were Joseph and Nicodemus, Gamaliel, Jehonias and Johanan, and many others who were known to be friendly towards the Carpenter. They had not been invited and so were unaware of the proceedings about to take place.

Into the midst of this waiting band was thrust the Christ, bound and fettered, as though He were the most dangerous criminal.

Murmurings of hatred broke forth from the assembled judges at the sight of the Carpenter, whose very presence was loathsome to them. Caiaphas and Gazar turned quickly at the sounds and a look of revulsion

passed over their faces as they gazed upon this Man for whose blood they were longing.

"Stand the Prisoner in the middle of the Hall," cried the High Priest to the guard.

At the command, Jesus was dragged to the very center of the chamber and there in the presence of them all was made to stand with His hands tied with stout cords behind His back.

The rabble which had been present at Annas' inquiry had filed into the room, taking their places at the back of the apartment.

Caiaphas advanced to the President's chair whilst Gazar and Annas placed themselves beside him.

Then arising, the ruling Pontiff addressed the meeting.

"Brethren," he said, "we have assembled to do the will of the Lord God of Israel, to pass sentence upon and mete out punishment to this blasphemous Culprit, whom ye see before you. He hath, by deed and words, sought to ridicule the priesthood of Aaron and hath endeavored to destroy our Temple and our cult. A Traitor to His nation, a Menace to her safety, He is unworthy to live."

He leered mockingly at the Christ as he spoke, and an angry growl escaped the councillors, showing them to be inimical to the Prisoner. They had not forgotten the manner in which He had spoken of them. He had branded them as hypocrites and a brood of vipers. Now, at last, He was in their power and they were determined to show Him no mercy.

From the mob at the back of the hall broke forth an angry cry:

"Kill the Traitor! Put the Blasphemer to death!"

Much pleased, Caiaphas smiled and raised his hand for silence.

But Jesus standing before them, pale and resigned, said nothing.

"We shall proceed to try the Culprit," cried the High Priest.

Then began one of the greatest travesties of justice the world has ever beheld.

In contradiction to all the canons of Jewish law which obliged the judges to respect the liberty of the accused until condemned, Christ was bound and ill-treated as though He were guilty of the very crimes for which He was being tried. The hearing was held at an hour when prosecution was illegal. The proceedings were obviously adopted with the intention of entrapping Him.

As the trial progressed and the various false witnesses gave their perjured testimony it was evident to even the bitterest councillors that they had failed to make a case against the Accused. There was not a shred of trustworthy evidence against the Master upon which a just sentence might be based. The statements made were contradictory.

Caiaphas realizing the situation, was greatly enraged as were also Gazar, Shemaiah and other prime movers in the capture of the Nazarene.

The mob sensing the failure of the inquiry and disappointed lest the Traitor should not be condemned began to murmur.

Seeing the beginning of trouble the old Sadducee turned to the presiding Pontiff saying:

"My lord we have failed miserably. Our witnesses have contradicted each other. The crowd is becoming enraged."

"What shall I do?" asked the priest. "We have proven nothing. But He must be condemned."

Gazar thought a moment. Then a light suddenly dawned upon him.

"My lord," he said, "Christ hath claimed to be the Messiah. Entrap Him into making that statement in public now and we shall thus make Him to condemn Himself as a blasphemer in the eyes of the people and the council."

"Wise old schemer," laughed the other and forthwith rapped with his gavel to restore order.

A hush fell upon the room as Caiaphas raising his hands to Heaven and assuming a pious attitude spoke solemnly to Jesus:

"I adjure Thee by the living God, tell me, art Thou the Christ, the Son of God?"

A death-like silence followed the question as the occupants of the chamber waited with breathless anxiety for the answer to the challenge.

Christ raised His eyes and looked steadily at His interrogator. Thus far He had maintained a majestic silence not deeming this band of fiends worthy of an answer. But now this man had appealed to Him in the name of His Father. He could no longer refuse.

He replied calmly and deliberately:

"Thou hast said it. I am He. I say to you that henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the power of God, coming in the clouds of Heaven."

At first the council members were too dumbfounded to speak. Then as the realization of what they had heard rushed upon them, they broke forth into a storm of angry protestations in which they were joined by the rabble.

Caiaphas pleased beyond measure with the success of his ruse cried aloud:

"He hath blasphemed, He hath blasphemed. What further need have we of witnesses?"

Saying which he seized his priestly garment and tore it into shreds.

"Ye have heard the blasphemy," he repeated, "what think ye?"

Like a pack of howling demons the entire assembly arose and shouted:

"He is guilty of death. Let Jesus, the Blasphemer, die. Kill the Traitor."

What a spectacle! A people demanding the death of its God!

Casting to the winds all semblance of legal proceedings the exasperated councillors rushed from their places and vented upon the Carpenter those feelings they had so long been forced to stifle.

Emitting a torrent of vituperation against the helpless Prisoner, they blindfolded Him and set Him in their midst that they might amuse themselves at His expense. They spat upon Him, kicked Him, slapped His sacred Face, and subjected Him to every indignity. But the Saviour calmly bore it all, uttering no word in protest.

Gazar approached the Master and striking Him a blow cried aloud in mock solemnity,

"Prophesy unto us, O Christ, who it was that struck Thee."

At which the bystanders laughed hilariously, but still Jesus remained silent.

At length, tiring of the sport, the mob conducted the Christ to the cell where He was to await the second trial before the Sanhedrin at sunrise.

During the hours preceding this second session of the court, the soldiers amused themselves with Jesus heaping upon Him every form of outrage and insult.

When, at length, the sun had risen the Master wearied and exhausted from the sufferings He had already undergone at the hands of the rabble, was led forth to meet the Sanhedrin again.

It was a Jewish law that no one might be put to death unless he had a second trial held on the morning after the day on which he had been sentenced.

Now the reader will recall that the first hearing of the Christ before the Sanhedrin took place in the early hours of Friday morning. Consequently the second trial should have been held on Saturday. But in their anxiety to have Jesus executed before the Sabbath began at sundown on Friday the Chief Priests and their followers dispensed with legal requirements and held the second trial on the same day a few hours after the first.

At this daylight session Caiaphas waiving all preliminaries proceeded directly to ask the same question.

"Art Thou the Christ?"

The Saviour, pale and haggard from the long night of torture He had undergone, answered steadily and clearly:

"Thou hast said it. I am."

He knew well that his declaration would have the same effect now as when He had made it some hours ago. He felt sure that He would be subjected anew to insult and outrage. But He did not falter.

The number of spectators was larger on this than on the previous occasion and their angry protestations were more pronounced and bitter.

Caiaphas cried:

"Ye have heard the blasphemy. What further need is there of testimony? He is guilty of death."

Loud murmurs of approval followed the query. Then the High Priest added:

"We shall take Him therefore to the Governor, who will impose sentence of death upon Him."

To which the rabble assented with ringing cheers.

So from the Hall of the Sanhedrin, Jesus, the Saviour, bound and fettered, was dragged before the judgment seat of Pontius Pilate the Roman Procurator.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ECCE HOMO

WHILST the Sanhedrin was assembled in its second session Gazar was conferring with Faustinus regarding the condemnation of Jesus. The young officer was overjoyed at the news that the Christ had been adjudged guilty, and had hastily departed for the Praetorium to prepare the Governor for the arrival of the Jews. It was necessary to secure from him a ratification of the death sentence before it could be carried out legally.

At length when the sun had already risen, about six o'clock in the morning, a great crowd assembled outside the Procurator's palace. It was a much larger mob than that which had been present in the Council Hall, for the news of the capture of the Christ having spread through the city, many aroused by curiosity had joined the rabble surrounding the Prisoner.

At the head of this concourse were Annas, Caiaphas, Gazar and all those who had so insistently persecuted the Master.

The procession halted in the piazza under Pilate's castle. Since the Hebrews could not enter a Gentile's home without incurring legal defilement they pushed forward to the large stairway giving access to the governor's apartments.

The shouts and cries of this assemblage soon attracted the attention of Faustinus who was within with his chief.

"My lord," he said peering over the terrace, "the Jews have come with their Prisoner and are clamoring for thee."

Without a word Pilate advanced to the terrace.

He was a man of about middle age, of stern military bearing, clothed in a toga denoting his gubernatorial rank.

He stood motionless for a moment gazing out upon the sea of faces below in the square.

He hated these Hebrews and despised their practices. He remembered with bitterness the conflicts in which he had been engaged with them and how they had disobeyed his commands and had even appealed to Rome against him. They had sought to worst him at every turn and now they came to ask him to put a prisoner to death. Well, he could not refuse to hear them, he told himself, for it was his duty to deliver the death sentence which could have no effect otherwise.

The people noting the Roman's prolonged silence began to clamor loudly.

"They await thy word, my lord," said Faustinus at his side.

Now the latter had prepared his chief for all that was about to happen. He had narrated in detail the feelings of the Jews towards the Christ but he had done so in such a bitter manner that the governor suspected that the young officer bore some spite or enmity against the Accused. At all events Pilate having a true Roman love of justice had decided that he would see fair play given to the latter and that he would not be forced to act by either Faustinus or the leaders of the Israelites.

Accordingly he raised his hand for order. The Roman soldiers stationed about the stairs to maintain discipline quelled the noise and disturbance. In the

silence which ensued the Procurator motioned to the leaders to advance with the Prisoner. They did so thrusting Jesus a little forward so that He was in full view of all. Haggard and dishevelled He presented a sorry spectacle, indeed.

The Roman ruler gazed for a moment upon Him; then he addressed the priests and scribes in a cold, clear voice :

"What accusation bring ye against this Man?"

In reply the crowds sent up a mighty clamor :

"Put this Man to death. He must die. Let Jesus, the Criminal, die."

Pilate commanded silence and repeated his question.

The leaders of the Hebrews were disconcerted. They had not expected this, so sure were they of their plans.

"My lord Pilate. . . ." began Faustinus.

But the latter motioned to the tribune to be quiet.

Finally Gazar's voice was heard :

"My lord," he cried, "if this Man were not a malefactor we would not have delivered Him up to thee."

The Governor seeing the flimsy structure of the case upon which the Prisoner was held shrugged his shoulders contemptuously :

"Then take Him ye and judge Him according to your laws," he flung at them and turned about to leave.

Terrified that the interview might end there, and the sentence of death might not be ratified Caiaphas cried aloud :

"It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

"We have found this Man perverting our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar saying that He is Christ, the King."

The Governor stopped and wheeled about sharply

as he heard the last words. So Faustinus had been right! This Man had set Himself up as a King! Well he would hear the case himself! He would examine the Accused and satisfy himself regarding His guilt.

"Bring the Prisoner to me," he commanded and seated himself in the judgment seat.

Jesus was led forward so that He stood facing the Governor.

The latter gazed long upon Him. Surely this Man could not be a revolutionary, he reflected. His face was not that of a criminal, His bearing not that of a rebel. He presented a picture of meekness and helplessness standing there before the tribunal. There was none of the arrogance or self-assurance which one associates with a pretender to a throne, he argued within himself. Still Faustinus had told him that the Fellow was an enemy of Rome and the leaders of His own nation had confirmed the charge. There must be something in it. Well, he would soon find out.

"Art thou the King of the Jews?" he asked.

Jesus cast one look upon His questioner before He addressed him:

"Sayest thou this thing of thyself or have others told it to thee of Me?" He asked.

Pilate was irritated by the Prisoner's query:

"Am I a Jew?" he snapped. "Thine own nation and the chief Priests have delivered Thee up to me. What hast Thou done?"

Jesus answered solemnly:

"My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world my servants would certainly strive that I should not be delivered to the Jews. But now My kingdom is not from hence."

The Governor was nonplussed. What a peculiar Fellow! His kingdom was not of this world! If it

were not of this world, where was it? he asked himself. Well the Man was a visionary that was certain and so long as this so-called kingdom did not interfere with Rome it did not concern him in the least. He would release the Accused.

"Then Thou art a King?" he asked again through curiosity.

Majestically the Christ made answer:

"Thou sayest that I am a King. For this was I born and for this came I into the world that I should give testimony to the Truth. Everyone that is of the Truth heareth My voice."

The Governor surveyed the Speaker thoughtfully.

"What is Truth?" he asked.

But before the Saviour had replied, His interrogator had arisen and led Him to the head of the stairs.

The buzzing of the multitudes ceased at sight of the twain. Faustinus' face lighted with expectation.

Then the Procurator speaking slowly and deliberately pronounced the result of his investigation.

"I find no cause in Him," he said.

The leaders fell back in astonishment at the words, seeing all their hopes dashed to the ground and their dreams of Christ's condemnation and death dispelled into thin air. Would the Malefactor be set free?

An angry storm of menacing cries and shouts broke forth from the mob.

"The rabble is disappointed, my lord," interjected the Praetorian colonel, himself greatly angered at the turn events had taken.

In distress Pilate turned again to Jesus.

"Dost not Thou hear how great testimonies they allege against Thee?"

But Jesus answered no word so that the Governor wondered much. The cries grew louder. The fury

of the mob was increasing. The puzzled Roman was at his wits' end as to what course he should follow.

Then in the din and confusion made by the horde at his feet he heard the cry:

"This man stirreth up the people teaching throughout all Judea beginning from Galilee even to this place."

He caught at the word Galilee. That was in the territory ruled by Herod. Being a coward and hence not having the courage to set the Accused at liberty since there was no crime against Him, Pilate decided to send Him to Herod, hoping thereby to extricate himself from the awkward position in which he found himself, and at the same time pleasing the Jewish leaders who were obviously intent upon the death of the Man.

"The Prisoner is a Galilean," he cried aloud. "Take Him therefore to Herod who will deal with Him as is fitting."

And saying the words he turned and left the place.

"The miserable weakling," hissed Gazar to Annas who stood beside him.

"Dog of a Roman," burst forth Caiaphas. "He will pay for his cunning trick in thus trying to rid himself of us."

Thus the enraged leaders reviled the diplomat who had by such a clever ruse sought to shift to other shoulders the responsibility he endeavored to shirk.

But there was nothing else to be done than to conduct the Nazarene to Herod.

Venting upon the Man-God their anger and unholy spleen they dragged Him to the palace of the Galilean Tetrarch.

Faustinus having been sent by Pilate to explain to

Herod the charge against Jesus, the ruler summoned the Accused into his presence.

He questioned the Saviour, and tried by every means at his disposal to make Him talk, but Jesus maintained a resolute silence so that the monarch being greatly angered, snatched a white cloak which he threw upon the Christ by which he branded Him as a fool, a visionary who was a victim of His own fancies and hallucinations.

Then standing in the judgment seat he commanded in stentorian tones,

"Take the Fool back to Pilate. Let him punish Him as is meet."

Back again to the Praetorium went the mob, led by the angry prelates now thoroughly disgusted by this dallying on the part of the officers of justice.

"By the Lord God of my fathers," quoth Gazar, "these men are trifling with us."

"But we shall force Pilate this time to render sentence," interjected Faustinus, "for I shall warn him that if he refuse to do so he is not a friend of Caesar."

The remark pleased the Israelites so that they smiled.

As He was dragged in chains through the streets, Jesus was the butt of every coarse joke and the object of much insulting conduct from the ever growing mob. But He calmly bore it all without a murmur. A Figure lone and helpless in that maddened rabble, He preserved that air of majestic royalty which a few days earlier He had displayed when entering the city as a King.

Arrived at last for the second time at the gubernatorial castle the crowd called loudly for Pontius Pilate.

In a moment he appeared on the terrace.

He scowled angrily at the sight of these people at his door with their Prisoner again, when he had felt sure that he had decided the matter once and for all.

What ailed these cursed Hebrew dogs? Were they intent upon forcing him to punish this Man?

He raised his voice and in angry tones addressed the mob:

"Ye have presented unto me this Man as one that perverteth the people. And behold I having examined Him before you find no cause in Him nor in those things wherein ye accuse Him. No, nor Herod either. For I sent you to him, and behold nothing worthy of death is done by Him. I wil chastise Him therefore and release Him."

Strange reasoning this! Christ had committed no crime yet the Governor would chastise Him! It shows us at a glance the weak vacillating character of Pilate who sought to please all parties and finished by displeasing all.

The leaders of the Jews were not satisfied with the plan and burst forth into angry exclamations. They wanted the death of Jesus. No half measures would suffice.

Two Roman soldiers went forth and taking the Prisoner led Him up the steps to the place where the punishment was to be given. The latter consisted of a scourging inflicted by lictors who were usually men of great brutality.

The voice of Pilate was heard again and at its sound the angry mob became silent.

"Ye have a custom that I should release unto you one at the Pasch. Will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

Like the roaring of an angry sea, with all the venom

of which human nature is capable, came back the savage cries of the multitude:

"No, not this Man; rather release unto us Barabbas."

Now the latter was a notorious criminal and robber who was a menace to society.

The Governor being greatly surprised at the answer and still hoping to save Jesus cried out again,

"What then shall I do with Jesus who is called the Christ?"

Again that cry as of the demons in hell:

"Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified!"

"But what evil hath He done?" demanded the puzzled Roman.

But the only reply that came to him was the deafening murderous yell of the maddened populace:

"Let Him be crucified."

What a sorry spectacle! A pagan arguing with the leaders of the Chosen People in a vain effort to save the life of the Messiah who had come to give them life!

Failing thus in all his efforts to preserve the Accused the cowardly Governor gave the order to his soldiers.

"Bind the Prisoner, and scourge Him at the pillar and bring Him to me when ye have finished your task."

A prolonged yell of devilish glee rent the air at the words and the multitudes cried joyously,

"Let Jesus die! Long live Caesar and his illustrious Governor, Pontius Pilate, our Lord."

At which the latter being greatly pleased, smiled and withdrew within his apartments to await the finishing of the lictors' task.

Meanwhile the Master was conducted to the Hall where the flagellation was to take place.

Stripping Him of His garments they lashed Him cruelly with cords in the ends of which metal thongs were attached so that ere long the Sacred Body of the Christ was a mass of gaping wounds from which the blood poured freely to the stone pavement. Blow after blow fell upon the quivering body of the Saviour who was bound to a post and as one soldier tired of the task another brawny legionary took his place. Thus the sport went on amidst the mad cheering of the mob and the cursing of the pagan lictors. But hardly a moan escaped the lips of the suffering Master.

"Strike the King of the Jews harder," cried Faustinus, who stood near the pillar cruelly taunting the afflicted Christ. "Whip the Traitor till He fall insensible."

To which the scourgers replied by a renewed effort at cruelty, raining the blows with such force upon their Victim that they fell exhausted, and others of their companions were forced to take their places.

Coming to within a foot of the bleeding Prisoner the Praetorian colonel jeered at Him, calling out mockingly:

"Hail, Jewish King, Thou who wouldest seek to overthrow the power of Rome. Hast Thou learned a lesson now not to play at royalty?"

The soldiers guffawed, and the officer well pleased with himself continued:

"It would delight Caesar, to behold such a monarch as Thou."

Thus the punishment went on until the Christ was a mass of torn and broken flesh, streaming blood from every part of His sacred body. The officer in charge of the flagellation realizing that if the soldiers continued, Jesus would die at the pillar gave the order to cease the whipping.

The ropes binding the Saviour were cut and He fell forward upon the floor in a pool of His own blood.

"Get up, Thou lying deceiver. Get up," shouted the angry Faustinus and the cry was taken up and repeated by the pagan legionaries.

Two of the latter hastened forward and dragging Jesus from the ground stood Him against the pillar.

The young colonel laughed loudly at the sorry spectacle presented by the blood-covered Messiah.

"A King, by Bacchus, a King!" he roared, amidst the plaudits of the bystanders.

Then a brilliant idea struck him.

Snatching a scarlet cloak from one of the soldiers he threw it upon the lacerated shoulders of the patient Victim.

"Thou didst call Thyself a King," he grinned. "Now Thou hast a royal mantle."

The soldiers, went wild with laughter, and following their chieftain's lead, heaped abuse and odium of every type upon the Saviour. One of them seized upon a bundle of thorny twigs lying nearby and weaving them in a crown placed it upon the Prisoner's head. Another not wishing to be outdone by his comrade secured a staff which he thrust into the hand of the suffering Lord.

"Hail, King of the Jews," shouted Faustinus anew, and he bent his knee in mock homage at the words. But on arising he smote the Christ a ringing blow upon the face crying as he did so, "Fool."

The soldiers took up the sport bowing before Him in derision, pushing Him, kicking Him, and ill-treating Him in every manner which the depravity of the lowest dregs of human nature can suggest.

When the sport had dragged on for some time the officer who commanded the soldiers decided that it was

time to return to the Governor's court and Faustinus left in advance to warn that official that the Christ was about to appear again before him.

Whilst this terrible scene was being enacted inside the Praetorium the High Priests were busily engaged amongst the mob outside of Pilate's castle.

By lying statements they stirred the masses up against the Master and destroyed whatever little feeling of sympathy for Him which might yet exist amongst them.

"People, hear me," cried Gazar, "what know ye of Jesus? Hath He not shown Himself to be an Impostor, an Upstart who would draw the nation into conflict with Rome by His rebellious conduct? Ye have shown your wisdom this day in condemning such an one who is a Visionary and a Blasphemer. Ye have demonstrated again your loyalty to Jehovah our God and to His appointed ministers, your High Priests."

The crowds cheered the old Sadducee's words.

"Then finish the task ye have begun," he continued. "Force Pilate to put Jesus to death. For in that way only will our nation be rid of His sacrilegious presence."

In this fashion the leaders of the people went amongst them, inciting them to demand the death of the Messiah, and if there were in that mob any whose hearts were kindly disposed to Him, they did not have the courage to speak openly in His defense, fearing to do so either through dread of the consequences of such an act or because they doubted the truth of the claims which Jesus had made.

It was only a few days ago that many of these people had cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," but today there was not one to say a word in His favor. Ah, the instability of human nature!

Presently a great silence fell upon the rabble for the Governor and his Prisoner had appeared again upon the terrace.

The crowd went wild with excitement at sight of the Christ, but the Procurator raising his hand for silence pointed to the blood-stained Figure at his side and cried aloud:

"Behold the Man!"

"Demand His death," counselled the leaders.

Whereupon a demoniacal cry rent the air resounding again and again:

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate hesitated. He would not be forced by these howling maniacs below. He would see Roman justice done in spite of them.

But more insistently arose the cry.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

The Governor turned angrily upon the mob.

"Take Him ye and crucify Him for I find no cause in Him."

"We have a Law and according to the Law He ought to die because He made Himself the Son of God," came back the roar of the populace.

"The Son of God" Pilate repeated to himself.

All the superstition of his Roman soul was aroused at the words. He did not wish to become entangled with any dispute concerning religion. What did the words mean? The Son of God!

Turning to Jesus he again led Him to the judgment hall where, seating himself, he asked:

"Whence art Thou?"

But the Christ was silent.

Torn between fear and the desire to release this strange Man the Governor asked sharply:

"Speakest Thou not to me? Knowest Thou not that

I have power to crucify Thee and I have power to release Thee?"

For a moment the eyes of the blood-soaked Figure fell upon the vacillating official in whose presence He stood and in His heart was born a great compassion for this weakling who had not the courage of his convictions, who feared to do that which he knew to be right because in the doing he might incur the displeasure of the masses.

Then slowly He addressed His questioner:

"Thou shouldst not have any power against Me unless it were given thee from above. Therefore he that hath delivered Me to thee hath the greater sin."

Shaking with fear, haunted by the dread of preternatural powers, the superstitious Roman arose and led Jesus forth once more to the Jews.

He was determined now not to incur the wrath of any unknown gods by an action which might displease them.

Signalling for order he announced:

"I have decided to set the Prisoner free, for I can find no cause in Him."

Again an angry storm of denunciations was let forth but the Governor was adamant.

"I shall release Him," he cried.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" roared the mob.

"Nay, I shall set Him at liberty," stubbornly answered the other.

The leaders of the Jews were noticed suddenly rushing about amongst the people.

Presently the object of their work was made manifest for to the Governor's ears was borne a ringing cry:

"If thou releaseth this Man, thou art not Caesar's

friend. For whomsoever maketh himself a King speaketh against Caesar."

Pilate blanched with fear. They had hit upon his weak point.

He remembered only too well the trouble he had had with the Hebrews before. He recalled how he had been reprimanded by Caesar for his previous conduct. Should they report him again he would probably be recalled in disgrace.

What should he do? He looked in indecision from Jesus to the crowd.

To release the Criminal was to sign his own death warrant. Yet he felt sure that the Man was innocent. On the other hand the people had accused Him of sedition against the Empire. But they had not proved the charge.

He reflected another moment whilst the cries of the rabble became more insistent.

It was not worth risking his whole fortune and his future for the sake of this Visionary he told himself. Surely the Jews must understand the case better than he. It would be foolhardy to allow himself to be swayed by the emotional impression the Fellow had made upon him.

The voice of Faustinus beside him disturbed his meditations.

"Pardon me, my lord, but the people are in an angry mood and could do thee much harm should they represent thee falsely to Caesar."

The Governor answered nothing to the young officer but addressing the people called out loudly:

"Shall I crucify your King?"

Back came the deafening shrieks of the populace:

"We have no king but Caesar."

"Take Him then," cried the Procurator defeated at last, "take Him and put Him to death."

A wild acclamation greeted his words:

"Long live Caesar, Emperor and King, long live our noble governor, Pontius Pilate."

But the latter had turned away in disgust and summoning a slave had bade him bring water and a towel.

His order was quickly obeyed and in an instant the rabble beheld with amazement a servant pouring water over Pilate's hands, then drying them with a towel.

"I am innocent of the blood of this Just Man, look ye to it," cried the Roman.

"His blood be upon us and upon our children," answered the infuriated mob.

Then the Governor casting one long sad look upon the Christ gave Him into the hands of His enemies.

"Take the Prisoner and crucify Him," he commanded a centurion. Saying which he turned about and left the place.

The crowd yelled with fiendish glee when some moments later the centurion appeared with the cross upon which Christ was to die.

"At last, at last, we are avenged," shouted Gazar in excitement.

"The foul Nazarene is about to pay the price," exulted Caiaphas.

"Prepare men for the comedy of the cross," exclaimed Annas to the mob which greeted the Primate's remark with cheers.

But all the while the Saviour had maintained silence, uttering no word, making no protestation against the indignities and outrages offered to Him.

Presently the soldiers coming to Him stripped from His lacerated body the rough garments which He wore.

These latter had adhered to the torn flesh so that

force was required to tear them from His sacred Person and in consequence the blood flowed anew from every wound.

Cries of ridicule rent the air as the rabble beheld this spectacle and the leaders gloated upon it.

The latter remembering that they had not procured the inscription which by Roman Law should precede the criminal on his way to judgment, Faustinus betook himself to the Governor to ask for it.

Taking a board Pilate wrote:

'Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews!'

"My lord," said the colonel surprised by what his chief had inscribed, "write not King of the Jews but rather that He claimed to be the King of the Jews."

The Governor turned fiercely upon the officer.

"What I have written, I have written," he snapped.

And Faustinus, understanding that further conversation was useless, saluting his superior withdrew.

The latter sat for some time gloomily recalling all that had transpired and secretly cursing the Jews for having once again conquered him.

"This Man Jesus was innocent," he murmured half aloud. "He called Himself the Son of God."

He paused. Then after a while spoke again:

"I wonder."

Having said which he arose and left the chamber intent upon forgetting everything connected with the Prisoner whom he had condemned.

Meanwhile Faustinus had hastened to the group of executioners with the inscription.

Caiaphas and his followers were displeased with the wording but the officer having explained the Procurator's action, they were obliged to be content.

Taking the board from the colonel Gazar hung it around Christ's neck adding in derision as he did so:

"Hail, King Christ, we put upon Thee Thy title."

A burst of laughter and cheering went up from the delighted multitudes.

Then the centurion to whom the execution had been entrusted gave orders to the soldiers to form in procession.

Jesus with the heavy cross upon His shoulders was dragged forth. On either side of Him marched a thief also bearing a cross.

Again the rabble jeering and shouting rushed madly to surround the suffering Master. But in a loud voice the centurion commanded them to fall back and forth-with the legionaries surrounded the condemned Christ and His associates.

Seated upon his charger at the head of the sad procession the officer turned about when all was ready.

"To Calvary, the place of execution," he cried.

And amidst the cheers of the mob Jesus began His painful journey to Golgotha.

The priests and leaders were in a state of the greatest excitement on beholding their victory. Christ was on His way to death at last. Their plans had succeeded. No longer would He be a menace to them. They need fear Him no more.

From the terrace above, Pilate watched the funeral cortège move off and a feeling of guilt seized upon him which he could not shake off.

He had failed in his duty. He had allowed himself to be cowed by a band of ruffians. He had been a coward. Until the day of his death the blood-stained Figure of Jesus haunted him and made his life unhappy.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MIRACLE

**I**N spite of the fact that Aureliana had suffered from the shock caused by the previous night's accident and had besides endured the agonies of a terrific mental torture she arose early on the morning of that day known to us as the first Good Friday.

Entirely refreshed, without the slightest trace of weariness or depression, she joined her mother on the roof terrace after having bathed and breakfasted.

Faustinus unaware of the narrowly averted tragedy was still engaged at the trial of Jesus at the Praetorium. He had sent a messenger early in the morning to inform his fiancée that he was occupied with an important matter but would come to her as soon as his duties would permit.

Donatus had not yet returned from the Fortress nor had he been acquainted with the news of the mishap which had so nearly cost his daughter her life.

The Lady Gratiana was overjoyed to find her child so bright and cheerful, marvelling much at the girl's vivacity.

"Thou art particularly gay and happy this morning, my dear," she said as the two were reclining upon a divan on the house-top whither they had gone to enjoy the pure morning air and the brilliant April sunshine.

"Aye," said Aureliana, "for though I do not see the

beauty of the world, I hear the singing of the birds, I feel the warmth of the sun, I smell the sweet perfume of the flowers and I know that I am living. One learneth to appreciate life the more when one hath been snatched from death."

The mother shuddered at the remembrance of last night's happening.

Then they both laughed for sheer joy at the happy ending events had taken. For some time they continued conversing thus until a slave came to summon Gratiana below.

"My child," said the latter arising "I am forced to leave thee now. Shall I send the slaves to amuse thee?"

"Nay, mother," said the girl, "send my Hebrew maid, Rebecca."

"Very well, my dear," replied the other, kissing her daughter affectionately.

Then turning she descended the stairway.

Left alone Aureliana spoke softly:

"Jesus, my Lord, I have not forgotten last night's temptation nor the ordeal through which I passed. I shall remember Calvary's Road and strive to bear all my trials cheerfully in imitation of Thee."

A smile lighted her features as settling back comfortably amongst the cushions she awaited the coming of the Jewess.

In a few moments the latter appeared.

"My lady Gratiana bade me come to thee," she said deferentially.

"Come seat thyself beside me, Rebecca," answered the Roman kindly.

The servant obeyed.

"I trust thou hast recovered fully from the shock of last night's accident" she began.

"Speak not of it," laughingly rejoined the blind girl,  
" 'tis past and I have not suffered from it."

"It is well," added the Hebrew lapsing into silence.

Aureliana struck by the maid's gloomy manner inquired with much consideration.

"What aileth thee, Rebecca? Why art thou so sad?"

"It is nothing," replied the other.

"Thou art deceiving me," chided her mistress, "what is it that disturbeth thee?"

"I grieve," slowly answered the Jewess, "because Jesus the Master hath been taken."

"Jesus taken!" cried the horror-stricken Roman.

"Aye, my lady, He hath been tried and condemned to death by Pontius Pilate."

"Condemned to death by the Governor," shrieked the blind girl, "O it cannot be true."

"Alas, my lady," continued the other speaking with difficulty, "it is all too true. Jesus was scourged at a pillar by the command of Pilate, who also sentenced Him to die upon a cross on the Hill of Calvary."

"O Jesus, Jesus! Then the dream hath come true," exclaimed Aureliana bursting into tears. "Thine enemies have taken Thee. Calvary's Road is a reality."

Rebecca glanced in a puzzled manner at the speaker but the latter did not explain the words. The servant realizing her own inferior position did not dare to ask their meaning.

For a few moments Aureliana wept bitterly and the Jewess seeking to soothe her caught the words she uttered between the sobs,

"I—walk—on—Calvary's—Road—that—mankind  
—may live——"

"Weep not so" consoled the domestic, "Jesus is divine. He will conquer."

"Oh, but we must do something to help Him."

"There is nothing we can do, my lady."

The latter paused, then sat up suddenly.

"I shall send for Faustinus," she cried hopefully, "he will use his influence with the Governor to have the Christ set free."

"It would be useless to summon thy lover, my lady," answered the servant slowly.

"Why?" cried the other.

"Because my lord Faustinus is a bitter enemy of Jesus. At the trial in the Praetorium he urged the Master's condemnation."

"Rebecca," exclaimed her mistress in surprise, "what is this that thou sayst? My Faustinus, the gentle and kind lover, an enemy of Jesus! Thou art mistaken, my dear, a Roman noble loveth justice too much that he should seek to effect the condemnation of an innocent Man."

"I was not present at the trial of the Christ, my lady," continued the other, "but the news of the happenings there have spread quickly through the city. The Jews speak much of the part played by my lord Faustinus at the hearing, claiming him to be one of the bitterest enemies of the Master."

"Art thou sure?" demanded the other incredulously.

"Aye, my lady, those who told me heard the Praetorian officer urge Pilate to put Jesus to death."

"O Faustinus, Faustinus, what hast thou done?" wailed the blind girl, "thou hast helped condemn Him whom I adore."

She sank back upon the divan sobbing as though her heart would break.

Then suddenly arousing herself she called out excitedly:

"Rebecca I shall save the Master even in spite of His enemies. I shall send a message to my father. He hath great influence at the Praetorium. He will constrain Pilate to set Jesus free. Summon a slave at once to go to him."

"My lady——" began the Hebrew servant. But the words died on her lips for at that very moment the still morning air became filled with the angry shoutings and menacing cries of a great crowd.

"What is it?" demanded the startled Aureliana.

The Jewess greatly frightened, hastened to the balustrade and looked into the highway.

It was filled with an immense slowly advancing mob, at whose head rode a detachment of soldiers, their armor gleaming in the sunlight.

Rebecca knew only too well the meaning of the procession. Turning to her mistress she cried:

"It is the Christ carrying His cross to Calvary where He will die."

"The Christ!" exclaimed the other springing up.

"Aye, my lady," rejoined the servant, coming to the blind girl's side, "Jesus must pass thy castle to reach the place of Golgotha outside the city's walls."

"Must pass the castle?"

"Aye, my mistress. The street leadeth to Calvary."

"Then this is Calvary's Road," replied the other as though she were dazed by the news she had heard. And she burst into tears.

Rebecca said nothing for she had turned her head in the direction whence the shouts came. She could hear them more plainly now for the multitude was nearer.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him! We—have—no—King—but Caesar," groaned the mob.

The Roman girl too was listening though she wept bitterly.

"O Rebecca, Rebecca we must do something," she sobbed.

"There is nothing we can do," answered the other sadly, as again arose the howling of the maddened rabble in the highway.

"Cru—ci—fy—Him, Cru—ci—fy—Him."

"But He hath done no evil," exclaimed the blind girl, "why have the people turned against Him? What hath become of Roman justice that Caesar's ambassador should condemn to death an innocent Man?"

"Have patience, my lady," soothed the servant, "Jesus is divine. He will conquer."

Louder and louder grew the din and noise as the mob filed slowly up the incline leading to the Porta Antiqua, thence to Calvary.

"We—have—no—King—but—Caesar. Cru—ci—fy—Jesus—the—Carpenter."

"O Rebecca, I cannot stand it longer," cried the grief-stricken Roman lady. "Lead me below that I may at least be near the Christ even though I may not help Him."

The words startled the domestic.

"Into the street, my lady?" she asked.

"Aye, into the street."

"But, my mistress, it were folly to go into the highway. The multitude is incensed and might perhaps do violence to thee."

"Cru—ci—fy Him! Crucify—Him!" roared the mob; and drowned the sound of the voices of the women on the terrace.

Aureliana's very heart was torn by the savage shouts

of the ruffians who cried out thus against the Wonder Worker.

"Lead me below at least to the gate of the castle. I command thee," she said with determination.

Without another word Rebecca conducted her mistress weeping and heart-broken down the marble staircase to the portal of the palace.

"My lady," she exclaimed, peering through the gates, "the street is filled with soldiers and an immense multitude. The procession is nearly at the castle."

The growing noise and shouting convinced Aureliana that the servant spoke the truth. The clang of armor told her that the forces of Rome were playing their part in the execution of Jesus the Master.

"Blasphemer, Traitor!" bellowed the rabble. "Crucify the Nazarene, kill the Carpenter."

"Rebecca, Rebecca, tell me canst thou see the Christ?" pleaded Aureliana, gripping the Hebrew's arm.

The latter looked again, her face betraying the emotion she sought to stifle.

"O my mistress," she wailed, "I see Him in the midst of the mob. He is covered with blood. His head is crowned with thorns. His face is convulsed with pain. His clothes are torn and He is staggering underneath the weight of His cross."

"O Jesus, I compassionate Thee," murmured the other through her tears.

A roar of laughter arose from the crowds at that moment and they cheered loudly.

"What is it, what is it?" demanded Aureliana.

Rebecca glanced into the street again and burst into tears at the sight she beheld.

"O my mistress," she cried, "Jesus hath fallen in a heap beneath the cross. The priests and soldiers kick

Him as He is lying in the dust of the roadway, He is making another—He is up again."

"Hail, King of the Jews!" cried some of the mob mockingly.

"Whip the Blasphemer. He is pretending," shouted the Jewish leaders.

For a few moments the air was filled with savage cries and groans of the rabble, as the Master now wearied to the point of exhaustion, resumed His painful journey.

"Hail, King of the Jews!" again taunted the masses as Jesus patiently dragged His cross along.

Aureliana, listening to the imprecations heaped upon the Christ by these fiends, was quivering with emotion.

"O my lady," called the weeping servant, "He is scarcely able to move, yet they seek to force Him on. The blood is streaming from every part of His body. His matted hair falling in His eyes, obscureth His vision so that He stumbleth."

She caught her mistress' arm in excitement.

"He is coming nearer, He is—"

"Jesus of Nazareth, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God," rang out the voice of the Roman girl, "Jesus of Nazareth, have mercy upon me, save me."

"My lady, my lady, be calm," cried the startled Hebrew woman.

But the other only called the more insistently:

"Jesus of Nazareth, my God and my King, have mercy on me."

In the din and confusion which reigned outside, it was impossible for Aureliana's voice to reach the Master's ears. But strange to relate He turned in the direction where she stood.

"Jesus of Nazareth, I believe in Thee," again she cried.

A smile lighted the pain-wracked countenance of the Christ. He lifted one torn and bleeding hand from the cross and held it poised for a moment in benediction. And in that very instant the pagan girl shouted with delight:

"I see! I see! I am cured."

"My lady, thou art overwrought," cried the servant, fearing that under the severe emotional strain her mistress had gone suddenly mad.

"Nay, I am cured," protested the other, "rejoice with me. Jesus the Master hath cured me. O Jesus, Jesus, I thank Thee, Thou art my Lord, my God, and my all."

"My mistress——" interjected the Jewess.

"Nay, nay, cease thy protestations," cried Aureliana, "I am completely cured. Jesus hath restored my sight to me. Come with me. We shall follow Him on Calvary's Road."

And before the domestic could utter another word her mistress, overjoyed at the miracle which had been performed upon her, was hurrying out the gate into the street, crying out loudly:

"Jesus, Jesus, I shall follow Thee now, in truth, on Calvary's Road. Christ, my God, I shall go with Thee to Calvary's Hill to watch with Thee until the end."

Although fearful of the mob outside, the Hebrew followed the Roman lady into the highway.

So concerned was Aureliana over the plight of the suffering Lord, so intent was she upon coming near to Him, that she forced her way into the crowds with the assurance of one who had never been blind. She did not give a thought to all that the future would hold

for her, now that her sight had been restored. She did not pause to consider that Johanan's prophecy had been more than fulfilled. She only knew that she could see again and she was determined to gaze upon the agonizing Jesus and if possible bring Him succor.

The Jewess could hardly credit the fact that her mistress had been cured. Yet there was no denying it, for there she was seeing perfectly, making her way towards the Man beneath the cross.

So the servant, too dazed by the miracle to speak or even think, followed close behind her mistress.

"Hasten, Rebecca!" cried the latter, turning towards the servant, "we must bathe the brow of the Master, and if we may, help Him to carry His burden."

"We cannot," cried the Hebrew in alarm.

"But we must. Come, come," cried Aureliana, still pressing forwards.

The narrow streets of the Holy City were congested with a seething mass of humanity on that first Good Friday. Not alone the mob accompanying Christ had thronged the narrow lanes of the Capital, but the populace learning of the humiliation of the Nazarene had flocked into the highways to witness His ignominious journey to Calvary.

Dense crowds lined the route of march and availed themselves of every vantage point whence they might view the spectacle of Christ's degradation. On house-top, terrace and balcony, at the gates and windows of palaces and hovels, curious onlookers watched Jesus going to be murdered. According to their own particular feelings the multitudes jeered the Criminal loudly, or if perchance they believed in Him, they held their peace. For Jewish law forbade any to

speak kindly or show by outward action compassion or pity for a condemned person.

The way itself over which the Saviour passed was choked with a boisterous swarm of people stretching from side to side, so completely blocking the passage that a centurion and officers riding on horseback went before the funeral cortège, forcing an opening for the wretched men toiling in the stifling heat to Golgotha, the place of execution.

Every class and nation under Heaven was represented there that day.

Natives of Jerusalem held their heads high with pride that they were thus punishing an enemy of their fair city. Patriarchs with flowing beards of white and women hoary with age shouted maledictions upon the Prince of Peace as He staggered along the Via Dolorosa. Dark men whose malignant faces bespoke their evil lives sneered at the Lord of Goodness and Purity passing by. Vagabonds and beggars in tattered clothing, ruffians whose ribald jests marked them as the scum of the city raised their voices that they might heap their filthy curses upon this Man who suffered for them. Youths and maidens, little children—boys and girls,—all watched with amazement the spectacle of a God-Man going to His death for the salvation of the world.

Ah, the fickleness of men! Just a few days ago these selfsame people had welcomed Jesus with Hosannas of praise. Today they revile and mock Him as a common malefactor.

With the sons of the Holy City stood, shoulder to shoulder, children of every nation of the world. Thousands of the descendants of the Dispersion had come unto Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. These, attracted by the novel spectacle of a crucifixion, had

thronged the line of march and gazed interestedly upon the scene.

Members of the Gentile nations, too, mingled freely with the Israelites, enjoying the sport provided by the leaders of the Temple.

Haughty Romans wound their togas more closely about them as they smiled grimly upon the sufferings of the Christ. Swarthy Arabs jabbered boisterously in their native tongue. Ethiopian freeman, their white teeth gleaming, grinned good-humoredly at the Slave beneath the cross. Turbaned Egyptians shrugged their shoulders at the Hebrew sport, whilst the sons of Greece looked disdainfully upon the Malefactor. To each and all of these unorthodox peoples the Master was just another criminal going to his death for some crime. Little did they realize that they were witnessing the sad spectacle of the Lord of the World on His way to execution that mankind might be saved.

But in all that mighty host of human beings there was not one to speak a word of comfort to Him. Through the blood and sweat pouring down His sacred countenance, He could distinguish only hostile looks upon the faces of the bystanders.

"Hasten, Rebecca, we are almost at the side of Jesus," spoke Aureliana, darting forward.

The people awed by the presence of this pagan aristocrat clothed in patrician purple and gold fell back momentarily to let her pass. Thus she came within a few feet of the Christ.

"Hail, Jesus my King, I adore Thee," she said.

Gazar sprang forward.

"Dog of a Roman, begone!" he shrieked in a towering rage. "Speak not to the Prisoner. He is condemned."

The girl, surprised at the language which the Sad-

ducee had used to her, for none had ever addressed her save in kindly accents, stopped for an instant. The crowds cheered, and sweeping madly on, thrust Aureliana aside.

"Jesus, Jesus," she wailed.

But the Saviour had already passed along and she found herself pushed farther and farther from His side by the rushing torrent of humanity.

Fortunately for Gazar, Faustinus riding in advance had not witnessed the incident.

"It is wiser to return to the castle," pleaded the frightened Rebecca.

"Nay, I shall go to Calvary," returned Aureliana.

"But it is dangerous," pleaded the Hebrew.

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" roared the mob.

"Jesus is in danger," cried the Roman girl, "I shall not leave Him."

And dragging her servant after her, she again pushed forward.

Meanwhile the lacerated Criminal, becoming at each step weaker and more exhausted, dragged His cross along leaving a trail of blood behind Him on the highway.

At an intersection of the main roadway and a side street He stopped, and glancing towards a little group at the corner smiled wanly. The infuriated soldiers beat Him savagely, and tried to force Him to advance, but He stood motionless. Their blows rained fast and hard upon His wounded body; but still the Master gazed into the crowd, a great longing in His eyes.

"What is it, Rebecca?" asked Aureliana, noting the action of Jesus.

The servant glanced in the direction where the Christ was looking. Then she called excitedly to her mistress.

"See," she pointed, "it is Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. He is smiling at her."

At that very instant a Roman soldier struck the Prisoner forcibly with a club and pushed Him forward amidst the cheering of the crowd.

"Come, Rebecca, I must go to Mary," exclaimed the Roman girl, and started towards the place where the Virgin Mother stood.

But the latter had swooned ere the girl had arrived.

A little group was gathered about the Madonna. Those who comprised it were unknown to Aureliana, but their names are familiar to Christians. Mary Magdalen was there. So too was Mary, the mother of Salome, and John the apostle whom Jesus loved.

Not heeding their inquiring looks, the Roman girl knelt beside the prostrate figure of the Virgin. Taking the latter's hands into her own she kissed them tenderly.

The Mother of Jesus lay motionless, her head pillow'd upon the bosom of Magdalen. Her face was pale and lined with sorrow. Her eyes now closed, as though she slept, were deep-sunken and hollow. Her cheeks were wet with tears. Her breast rising and falling rapidly told of the Mother's heart which had been broken because of the suffering of her Son. Was it any wonder that she had fainted?

"O Mary, Mother of the Christ," cried Aureliana, bending over her. "I am a Roman, but I believe thy Son to be the Son of God. If I may not relieve His sufferings I can at least kneel before thee and compassionate thee."

She bent and kissed the countenance of the Virgin. The latter aroused perhaps at the touch opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked, somewhat dazed, although she tried to smile.

"On Calvary's Road," answered Aureliana kindly.

The smile on Mary's face died at the words.

"Ah, Calvary's Road," she murmured softly, "it leadeth by suffering and sorrow to God and Glory Eternal."

She paused, then added slowly:

"Calvary's Road—Ah, Jesus my Son and my God, now I remember all."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE MAN OF SORROWS

**I**N the annals of history, there is no record of a death sentence more cruel than that of crucifixion.

It was so brutal that it was reserved to the lowest and most dangerous criminals, and to the slaves who were not considered to be human beings. It was so shameful that Rome would not impose it upon her citizens, and the Israelites meted it out only to those whom they regarded as cursed by God.

This mode of execution was carried out in such a barbarous manner that we shudder at the very mention of the sufferings endured by one condemned to undergo it.

He who was to be crucified was first stripped naked. Then he was fastened with nails or tied with rope to a cross and elevated so that he might be in full view of the people.

Great numbers would gather around the victim as he hung upon the cross, and not only would they taunt him, but would add to his agony by the fresh indignities they inflicted upon him. They would whip him till they tired of the sport. They would beat him till his blood drenched the earth. They would invent means of torturing him till he was insensible from pain. And in all this they were encouraged by the law which forbade anyone to show pity to a condemned person.

For hours, perhaps, the dying man would hang upon

the cross the plaything of the mob. His cries merely whetted their appetites for blood. His protestations simply evoked the laughter of the crowds. It was only when merciful death released him that they ceased their cruelty.

But even then the ignominy to which the crucified was subjected had not ended. For the pagans were accustomed to allow his dead body to hang upon the cross for days, so that the crows and vultures and even the wild beasts came and devoured it and the bones bleached white and ghastly.

The rulers of long ago justified this inhuman punishment upon the grounds of its being a salutary warning to others that they would be treated in the same manner if they did not observe the law.

Could one imagine a death more terrible?

Yet such was the fate to which Jesus Christ was condemned by Pilate.

It was forbidden to inflict capital punishment within the confines of the Holy City, hence a site outside the walls was selected for the execution of the Master. This spot called Golgatha or Calvary was located a little to the northwest of the gate known as Porta Antiqua.

Calvary was not a steep mountain, as we are often led to believe, but was rather a mound or hillock.

Situated at the convergence of the great highways leading to Jerusalem from Bethlehem and Joppa, it was not only visible to the inhabitants of the Capital but was also in full view of the countless throngs who daily journeyed upon the great state roads.

Round about on every side of the hill verdant gardens extended, whilst fruitful orchards and spreading vineyards bespoke the prosperity of the husbandmen. At its base in the shelter of the great walls of the City

of David pilgrims to the feast had pitched their tents.

It was nearing the noonday hour when Jesus dragged the heavy cross through the Antiqua gate and out beyond the walls, thus quitting forever the city which had rejected Him.

He was now almost at the point of exhaustion, yet the soldiers and the priests beat Him more brutally than ever, until at length realizing that He might die on the way, they forced a countryman to help Him to carry the cross.

Slowly He toiled up the slopes of Calvary. Each step He took renewed the pains of His lacerated body. Each movement brought forth fresh blood from His wounds, yet he did not murmur.

The heat had become oppressive. The press of the people shut out from Him even a breath of air. The dust from the highway swirling aloft from the tread of so many feet stifled Him.

The crowds on the hillside had grown to tremendous proportions. Not only those who had marched in the procession and those who watched it flocked to the mount of execution, but also countless thousands of others learning of the crucifixion hastened to see the sight.

The din and shouting made by this host of human beings was indescribable. They struggled to get nearer to the Criminal. They pushed and jostled each other in an effort to secure a place whence they could enjoy to the full the spectacle of a Man being put to death in the barbarous manner I have already described.

"By the God of our fathers, Caiaphas," shouted Gazar with enthusiasm, "our plans have succeeded admirably. The people have shown their hatred for the dog of a Nazarene and regard us again with their wonted respect and honor."

"Aye," smiled the hypocritical priest, "we have rid Israel of a sacrilegious Pest."

The Sadducee grinned as he poked his kinsman in the ribs playfully.

"And we have safeguarded our own positions," he chuckled.

Then both laughed heartily, and Gazar joined once more with the crowd, shouting lustily:

"Crucify the Blasphemer of God! We have no king but Caesar."

And with the words a fresh shower of blows fell upon the shoulders of the Saviour, as He staggered silently upwards.

What a sight was presented on the slopes of Golgotha that day!

The sun was shining brightly in the clear, blue Eastern sky. The trees and grass were fresh and green. The multi-colored flowers in the gardens nodded their heads in the gentle breeze, the luscious grapes hung temptingly on the vines. High up in the heavens the birds winged their happy way, and made sweet music.

Just to the east of Calvary lay the wonderful City of David, its myriad palaces and castles reflecting the sun's rays, its Temple dazzling in the morning light.

And there on the hill was the Lord and Author of it all, bleeding and torn, surrounded by a pack of murderers thirsting for His blood and dragging Him to His death.

Somewhere in that vast concourse on Calvary were His friends, even though they did not dare speak openly in His defense.

Those whom He had cured, surely had not forgotten Him. The lame, the blind, the halt whom He had succored still believed in Him, and must have felt com-

passion for Him, now that He Himself was afflicted. Surely Lazarus was there! And Simon the Leper and the many others who had benefited by the Master's goodness in the days of His greatness!

And in that mammoth crowd were Mary His mother, and the Magdalen, and Aureliana.

After the Virgin had recovered, the Roman girl, with Rebecca, had taken her place beside Mary, accompanying her to the place where Jesus was to die.

They could not approach the side of the suffering Lord, for the crush of the throng thrust them back. But step by step they followed Him up the mountain.

The Mother of Christ consumed with grief uttered no word; and imitating her example, Aureliana held her peace though her heart was breaking at the indignities and outrages heaped upon the Saviour.

"O Rebecca," she said to her maid who was beside her, "the Master is at the point of death. We must do something."

"There is nothing we can do," returned the other sadly.

Just then a savage cry escaped from a man almost at her side.

"Hasten, King of the Jews. We shall set Thy throne on yonder summit."

Aureliana, glancing up quickly and recognizing the speaker shrieked, so that Rebecca and the Mother of Christ looked at her.

"What is it, my mistress?" asked the Hebrew servant with great solicitude.

"See," cried the girl, pointing to a Roman officer not far from them. He was dressed in the uniform of a tribune and a scarlet cloak draped his shoulders. "See, it is Faustinus. It is three years since my eyes have gazed upon him, but he hath not greatly changed.

I recognize him. It was he who spoke so bitterly to the Christ just an instant ago."

And another wail told of the misery she was suffering because of the knowledge that her lover was an enemy of the Master.

"O Jesus, Jesus, my Lord!" she cried.

At that very moment, even as she looked, the colonel approached the Criminal and struck Him across the face with the flat of his sword.

"O Rebecca, Rebecca," exclaimed the girl, turning her head away. "Thou didst speak the truth. Faustinus hateth Jesus whom I love."

And the girl sobbed as though her heart would break. But the servant said nothing, though she prayed secretly.

The Mother of Jesus had overheard the words spoken by the two. Turning to the weeping Roman, she said kindly:

"My child, have patience. My Son will conquer. He is divine. And He will soothe thy broken heart, for thou hast befriended me His mother."

Aureliana, comforted by the musical accents of the voice whispering consolation, smiled through her tears.

"I thank thee, O Mother of Jesus," she said, and wondered much at Mary's words.

The journey was nearly ended now. The Prisoner was almost at the summit of the mountain, and already the soldiers had gone forward to clear a space for the execution.

The priests and elders of the people moved about, urging the masses on in their denunciation of the Nazarene. The Pharisees were walking along, happy over the success of their task. The Roman centurion, his face stern and set as if he disliked his work, rode forward unmindful of the shouting of the rabble.

Higher and higher rose the sun in the sky as the sixth hour of the day approached.

"We must have the execution terminated ere the Great Sabbath beginneth at sundown today," said Shemaiah to Caleb.

"Aye," quoth the latter, "for it would defile the Lord's Day if such an unholy thing as the death of the Carpenter should occur during the Sabbath hours."

"Thinkest thou that He will have died before sunset?" asked Shemaiah anxiously.

"If not," replied the other grimly, "we shall break His legs to insure His death."

"The Blasphemer's legs are the only part of His body not already broken," guffawed the other, "the rest of Him is torn to pieces."

"Thanks be to the God of Israel!" added the pharisaical Caleb.

"Halt!" bellowed Faustinus in stentorian tones to the multitudes. "Halt! We have reached the top of the mountain. We must nail the Criminal to the cross."

Cheering broke forth at the officer's words and he smiled.

Aureliana, feeling as if she would faint, glanced upwards to where he stood. She could not believe that this man, who spoke so savagely, who acted so cruelly, was the gentle lover who had been so kind and considerate to her for five years past.

Oh, there must be some mistake, she assured herself. Surely Faustinus was not cruel and brutal. But her illusions were quickly dispelled, as she heard his voice ringing out again in the hush which had fallen upon the people.

"Do not advance further. Halt where ye are. Give the soldiers room to do their work. Ye shall have

your sport when the Malefactor is lifted up on high."

"Long live Faustinus, Rome's most loyal son," cried several voices led by Gazar.

And though her voice was not heard in the din, Aureliana too cried out:

"Faustinus, Faustinus, my love. Stop, stop please. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God."

But Mary heard her, and knew that she was suffering.

"Thy faith is great, my child," she soothed.

A roar of laughter followed by prolonged cheering rent the air. The Mother of Jesus groaned as she turned her gaze upon the crest of the hill, for there she beheld the spectacle which had prompted the outburst of ridicule—her Son was being stripped of His garments.

Impelled by a mother's love, she rushed forward as though she would save her Child from the ignominy to which He was being subjected.

In a moment she was lost in the crowd. Aureliana sought vainly for her. But it was useless. She had been swallowed up in the hordes of human beings. With her had gone the Magdalen and John.

"We have been separated from the Master's mother," moaned the Roman girl, turning to Rebecca.

"Aye," answered the latter simply, too dazed by all she saw to speak.

At that moment the sound of steel striking steel was heard.

"What is it?" cried Aureliana.

Rebecca knew its meaning only too well.

"They are nailing Jesus to the Cross," she answered, bursting into tears.

"O Rebecca, is there nothing we can do?" wept the Roman, tearing her hair in despair.

"Nothing," sobbed the Jewess as at that moment she distinguished Faustinus bending over the prostate form of Jesus where He lay upon the cross. The officer was directing the men in their work of nailing the Master's hands and feet with spikes.

One by one the sounds of the blows as the hammers hit the nails fell upon the ears of the two sorrowful women and smote them sorely. They tried to console each other, yet it was to no avail. But from the patient Victim stretched on His bed of pain no word of complaint escaped.

The centurion who was in charge of the execution had sent the soldiers to dig the holes in which the crosses of the three prisoners were to stand. And when these were prepared he came to Faustinus.

"We are ready," he said.

The colonel stood aside as the other assumed command.

"Men," cried the centurion, "lift the crosses into position."

First they placed the crosses whereon the thieves were bound with ropes. Then they lifted up that upon which Jesus was nailed.

The men strained under the weight. Their brawny arms swelled and their sinews expanded, as they steadied the cross with its Precious Burden. Then at a word from the centurion they dropped it into the hole made for it.

The body of the Christ sagged downwards, and hung by the hands and feet nailed to the wood. The crowned head dropped, and the blood poured afresh to the earth.

The cross, standing out against the clear sky, was

plainly visible to everyone upon the mountain, and the title affixed to it could be read by many.

"Hail, King of the Jews," roared the mob, delighted with the sight. "Hail, Jesus Christ, Blasphemer of God."

Aureliana was so overcome that she could not utter a word. She only stared mutely upon this horrible scene. She could not even weep.

Just beside her a voice was heard to suddenly cry out:

"Jesus, Jesus!"

And an old man fell headlong upon the ground.

So interested were the bystanders with the spectacle of the Christ's humiliation that they did not pay the slightest attention to the one who had fallen. But Aureliana went quickly to his side.

He was a very old man and the Roman girl noting his pallid face and his wasted form knew that he was far spent.

Two other men were bending over him seeking to revive him. In a moment the patriarch opened his eyes and stared blankly at them.

"My mistress, it is Johanan," cried Rebecca excitedly.

Yes, it was he. The seer had followed the Master step by step from the Praetorium. Though his feeble voice had been drowned in the noise of the crowds, he had resolutely protested against the indignities heaped upon Jesus. Supported by Joseph and Nicodemus he had come to the place of Calvary, faithful to the Christ in His sufferings even as he had been during the hours of His triumph a few days ago.

Johanan's heart had been almost broken with grief when he had heard the ring of the hammers as the executioners nailed Jesus to the cross. But when the

latter had been lifted into place and he beheld the Master suspended aloft amidst the laughter and jeering of the crowds he could stand no more. He collapsed.

"Hast thou recovered a little?" asked Nicodemus kindly, as the old man tried to arise only to fall back helplessly again.

Aureliana gazed with amazement upon the man who had first brought real hope to her.

"I am Aureliana, the blind girl who gave the bracelet to Enan the beggar, in the Temple," she blurted out before she could control herself. "Thou didst promise that Jesus would hear my prayer. He did. He cured my blindness today."

The old man smiled wanly at her.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of these my little ones ye have done it unto me," he murmured softly.

Then he turned to the two councillors who knelt on the ground beside him.

"Gather closely about me," he said falteringly, "for I shall not rise again. I am dying."

Aureliana uttered a little cry and the men tried to dissuade the patriarch, but he continued:

"It is the end. God is calling me home."

He paused. When he spoke again his voice was weaker so that his companions had to bend down closely to hear what he said.

The crowds on the hill still laughed and ridiculed the Saviour on the cross. Rebecca drew nearer to her mistress that she might hear what Johanan said.

The latter turned to Joseph and Nicodemus. His breathing was harder and faster. It was evident that the end was near.

"There—is—one—last favor I would—ask—of—you," he said with difficulty.

"We shall do it," replied the two men, weeping softly.

"When Jesus—hath died, take His—body—down—from—the cross—and bury it. Do—not—leave—it for the—birds of the—air—and—the beasts of the—field—to—devour."

The councillors were somewhat disconcerted by the request. But they had promised and could not refuse.

"We shall bury it," they answered.

"Ah, now I die content," murmured Johanan.

He paused again. His breathing became more labored. He tried to speak, but the words came falteringly. His friends bent still more closely upon him.

"I—believe that—Jesus is the—Christ—the Son of God," he whispered. "He is dying for—mankind. 'Greater love than this—no—man—hath,—than—that—he lay down his life for—his friends.'"

Aureliana stroked his brow gently. He tried to smile at her as Joseph propped him up.

"Je—sus—my Lord,—and my—God!" he murmured with difficulty and fell back dead.

Thus beneath the shadow of the cross passed from this earth one who had believed in the Master, who loved Him and had defended Him and was willing to make any sacrifice to serve Him. He had followed Jesus on Calvary's Road in the same spirit of confidence and trust as when He had joined in the triumphal march on Palm Sunday.

Aureliana bent over the body of the dead man, and tenderly kissed him.

"Johanan, servant of God," she whispered in her tears.

Nicodemus and Jospeh drew a linen cloth over the

face of the patriarch and lifting his corpse from the ground carried it away.

"O Rebecca," exclaimed the Roman girl, "mine eyes have gazed upon Jesus and Johanan. The One is dying on the cross. The other hath died of a broken heart. Both have walked on Calvary's Road."

"Johanan hath gone to his Eternal reward," replied the servant. "Jesus is divine, He will conquer. Johanan and Jesus will meet face to face in Paradise."

"Aye," added Aureliana hopefully, "Calvary's Road leadeth through suffering to God and Glory Eternal."

Further conversation was prevented by the mad roar of the mob surging wildly forward, for just at that moment the guards about the cross were withdrawn, and Faustinus cried aloud:

"People, the soldiers have finished with the Criminal. He is yours now to do with as ye will. Mock Him, revile Him, ridicule Him at your pleasure. Make of Him what sport ye will, for He is an outcast."

The masses cheered the officer, who smiled complacently. Aureliana and Rebecca were pushed forward in the mêlée until they came within a few feet of the cross.

"We must go nearer still to Jesus," cried the Roman girl, dragging the servant after her.

Thus they came to the very foot of the infamous gibbet whereon hung the agonizing Lord.

"Hail, King of the Jews," mocked the rabble, "Traitor, Accursed of God. Hail, Blasphemer! Come down from the cross and we shall believe."

"O Jesus, Jesus, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God," exclaimed Aureliana, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Jesus, King of the Jews, I adore Thee," mocked

Gazar, coming to the foot of the cross and genuflecting. Then he picked up a handful of earth and stones from the ground and flung them into the face of the Christ, at which the amused multitudes roared with delight.

"Come down, Jesus, and rule us," shouted Caiaphas, standing attired in all his priestly robes before the bleeding Master.

Annas approaching shook his fist spitefully at the Saviour:

"Thou wouldst not answer me, Thou meddling Fool," he sneered, "but by the God of my fathers, Thou hast paid the price of Thy folly."

Thus did the priests and elders of the people lead the mob in reviling the dying Christ. They resorted to every form of brutality to increase His pain. They heaped every ignominy and insult conceivable upon Him, for they hated Him and were determined that He would satisfy to the full their longing for revenge.

Aureliana and Rebecca, powerless to aid Him, clung to each other consumed with grief. Not far from them stood a little group consisting of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and those who had accompanied her. And the Virgin's heart was broken anew at each groan of pain which escaped the lips of her Son on the cross.

The crowd had yelled itself hoarse. There was a momentary lull. The Figure on the cross spoke, and at the sounds of His voice the multitudes listened, for it was the first syllable the Victim had so far uttered.

The words He pronounced were the noblest ever recorded in the history of man. They were the plea of a dying man craving mercy and forgiveness for his murderers.

"Father in Heaven, forgive them, for they know not what they do," He cried.

Aureliana looked up again at Him who had spoken. His head was drooping upon His bosom. His blood was pouring copiously to the earth. But even as she gazed upon Him, Faustinus advanced to the cross, and striking Jesus with a whip cried savagely:

"Cease Thy prattle, Wretch."

And as the mob cheered his action, a cry from Aureliana's soul rent the air.

"O Jesus, forgive Faustinus. He knoweth not what he hath done. He is a pagan. O, have mercy upon him. Make him know Thee."

Jesus opened His eyes and for a moment His glance fell upon her. Then it rested upon the mighty sea of faces in front of Him. Every nook and corner of Calvary was filled. Shoulder to shoulder stood that mighty host of His enemies bent upon amusing themselves by torturing Him. He could read in their upturned countenances the hatred they bore Him. Just a few days ago they had welcomed Him as their King. But now upon His ears there fell only cries of mockery.

"Hail, King of the Jews."

And the Master, His heart broken by the spectacle, closed His eyes again in resignation as He whispered softly to His Father in Heaven.

"Not My will but Thine be done!"

## CHAPTER XIX

### CHOOSE NOW, ME OR CHRIST!

THE crowds on Calvary were so absorbed in their sport of taunting Jesus, that they had at first failed to notice the strange phenomena which began to occur when He had been lifted up on high.

The brilliant noonday sun which had blazed down so fiercely began to fade. Its light became pale and sickly. The stifling heat in which the masses had sweltered gave place to the chill of night as the sun's rays lost their warmth. The clear, blue sky became smoke-colored and threatening.

But still the mob on Golgotha paid no heed.

"If Thou be the Son of God come down from the cross and we shall believe in Thee," cried Caiaphas, amidst the plaudits of the bystanders.

"Others He saved, but Himself He cannot save," sneered Shemaiah. "He claimed to be the King of Israel, the Messiah. He trusted in God. Let God now deliver Him, and we shall have Him, for He said, 'I am a King.'" But the Man on the cross made no answer. He did not come down from His place of torture. He did not seek to save Himself. He bore their ridicule silently, bowing His head the more resignedly as He waited for the end.

"Vah, Thou that destroyest the Temple of God and in three days dost rebuild it. Save Thine own self. Come down from the cross and we shall believe in Thee," challenged Gazar.

"He said He would destroy the Roman Empire," shouted Faustinus, and the priests and elders nodded in approval at the officer's words.

Now the latter was secretly angered that in all the taunts and epithets hurled at Jesus, scarcely any mention was made of the fact that He had sought to thwart Roman authority. The leaders of the Hebrews seemed to be exulting in the Man's condemnation on the score of His having been disloyal to the Jewish cult.

Faustinus recalled that when Gazar had first enlisted his aid in bringing about the death of the Christ, he had explained that the Sanhedrin wished Jesus punished because He was disturbing amicable relations with Rome. At the Praetorium too the leaders had demanded the death of the Nazarene as an enemy of the Empire. But now that the Criminal was in their hands, and was dying, the Jews seemed to have forgotten all about His alleged offenses against the Imperial City, and were gloating over His execution as an unworthy Israelite who had sought to destroy their cult.

The Prisoner was being put to death as a rebel against Rome. If the people wished to taunt Him, why did they not remind Him of His having sought to incite them to revolution against Caesar. Had they not cried out, 'We have no king but Caesar'? Why had they changed the cry, now that the Christ was dying on the cross? Why all this talk about His having called Himself the Son of God? Why rebuke Him with having endeavored to destroy the Temple? What did that matter? He was not condemned for that. Rather, decided the colonel, they should remind Him that He had sought to overthrow the Empire. What did it matter if He had been unfaithful to Israel's

traditions? This was not the time to remind Him of that. He was a public Malefactor brought to judgment for unfaithfulness to Rome, not Israel.

Ah, the worthless Jews! He hated them all. They were miserable weaklings, jabbering fools who adored a God whom they could not see. They went about with long faces and pious looks, casting sorrow wherever they went. If he were Caesar, he concluded, he would wipe the vile brood from the face of the earth.

So Faustinus was sorely puzzled at the actions of Gazar and the others who had claimed to be such ardent defenders of Caesar's interests.

How little he understood the cunning of the wily Sadducee who had tricked him into playing such a rôle. How could he know that he had been made the dupe of the Master's enemies.

"Gazar," he shouted enraged, "the Criminal is condemned for His crimes against Rome, not against Judea."

The Jew smiled hypocritically as he lifted his voice with the cry:

"Jesus, Thou didst seek to overthrow Rome, the mistress of the earth. But Thou didst fail, as must all who would seek to defy our imperial mother."

And the colonel was so pleased with the words, that he cheered lustily, and in doing so failed to notice that the people did not take up the cry and shout as when Christ was reviled as a Blasphemer. How far Faustinus was from knowing the real truth, that the Nazarene was being murdered, not because the leaders of His nation cared whether or not He was loyal to Rome, but simply because He had usurped their own power, and had drawn the masses away from them by His doctrine and His miracles.

Meanwhile in the increasing darkness the Saviour underwent the most horrible sufferings conceivable.

"Come down from the cross!" cried Caleb.

And the people cheered again. But there was not the same ring of assurance in their voices now, as before. There was not the same volume to the chorus. For they had at last noticed the ominous gloom which hung over the land, and they were frightened.

Looking up at the sky, they were amazed to find that it had become darker and darker, until now it resembled a great dusky dome, opaque and lifeless. The brightness of the day had given place to a peculiar twilight, in which things appeared unreal and ghastly. The heat of the day had entirely disappeared, and it was now cold and damp. There was not the slightest breeze. On the contrary an awful stillness hung in the air, the portent of some impending catastrophe.

The multitudes assembled on Calvary were terrified. Their tongues became suddenly silenced, dreading what was about to befall their city. A solemn hush spread rapidly over the vast concourse which but presently had reviled the Master. And in the silence the groaning of the Man of Sorrows was plainly audible.

Their faces blanched by fear, their teeth chattering, the people inquired of each other the meaning of the extraordinary darkness.

Could it be a storm gathering? No, for there were no clouds, no outlines to break the smooth, murky vault of heaven. Rather it seemed that the very sun in the firmament was dying.

In the distance thunder rumbled, not as when a storm is coming, but insistently and angrily. Far away on the Judean hillsides, the frightened animals and the flocks cried out in terror as they madly rushed to

shelter. The birds thinking that night had fallen flew to their nests to sleep. The flowers in the fields and gardens bowed their heads; darkness settled upon the world.

Numbers of the rabble turned and fled from the mountain. Others too paralyzed to move, wrapped their garments more closely about them to protect themselves from the evening chill, and standing there at the foot of the cross waited, they knew not for what.

Gazar, Caiaphas and their coterie, although themselves badly frightened, maintained a show of bravery. To buoy up the flagging courage of the multitudes they continued calling out all manner of insults at the Victim. But their voices sounded hollow. They lacked their erstwhile assurance. It could be plainly seen that they were forcing themselves. Their efforts failed miserably. They could not arouse the terrified onlookers, for these latter were no longer interested in Jesus: they were thinking of themselves, and wondering what calamity would befall them, for surely this unusual phenomenon must bode some evil to their nation.

The soldiers who were still on the summit of the hill, being Romans, hence characteristically superstitious, were trembling. Legionaries, schooled in the things of war, fearless in conflict and unequalled for bravery on the field of battle, they were petrified in the face of the spectacle of twilight at noonday. It required force on the part of the centurion and Faustinus, themselves badly scared, to compel them to remain.

"What is it," asked Annas of Caiaphas, "an eclipse?"

"Nay," replied the other, peering through the gloom, "the Paschal moon is full. An eclipse is impossible."

"Maybe it is a storm," suggested Gazar shivering.

"Storm!" growled the High Priest sarcastically. "Maybe the reason is there," he added pointing to the cross.

And as the old Sadducee glanced in the direction designated by the Pontiff, he was convulsed with a violent fear, for at heart he was a miserable coward.

"Dost thou mean that the Nazarene——" but he trembled so much that he could not finish.

"Fool," stormed Caiaphas thoroughly aroused, "whom dost thou think the Nazarene to be? A common carpenter? Tell me, do carpenters bring dead men back to life? Do they cure the lame and the blind?"

"But I thought——" remonstrated the other weakly.

"Thou didst think," interjected the priest sharply, "thou didst think! There was no need to think. Thou art as well aware as we that Jesus is not an ordinary Man. Did we not decide that long ago? Did we not plot His death because He was spoiling our standing with the people?"

"Aye," added Annas, "thou hast not forgotten that we asked thee to enlist the power of Rome to kill Him, so that we might maintain our own prestige with the multitudes."

The thunder roared loudly. A vivid flash of lightning split the sky for a moment, and in its dazzling brilliancy the Figure of the Man on the cross was clearly outlined against the blackness. Then all was dark again, the only sound the death groans of the Victim patiently awaiting the end of His sufferings.

"O Rebecca, I am going blind again," shrieked Aureliana. "Everything is dark. I see nothing."

"Nay, nay," consoled the servant, herself in terror of the unusual darkness, "it is not that thy sight hath

been taken from thee again. But the sun is failing, and no longer giveth his light."

"What hath happened, why is it failing?" demanded the other.

"Israel hath put to death Jesus, who is the Christ. Nature herself is protesting against the fell deed we have committed," replied the servant.

Again and again the thunder boomed. Flashes of lightning rent the vault of heaven, until it seemed that the world must be consumed by fire.

Between the sixth and ninth hours—that is between twelve o'clock and three—the very middle of the day, the earth was engulfed in the gloom of night.

The terror-stricken crowds on Calvary dispersed, until finally there remained about the cross only the Priests and Elders of the people, and a little group of the Master's friends.

Caiaphas and Annas kept up a weak display of bravado. Gazar was silent, too nervous to speak.

Faustinus and the centurion were still on the summit with the legionaries. The Praetorian officer taunted Gazar for being afraid. But he could not induce the Sadducee to action, for he was shivering with fear.

The hours dragged by slowly, whilst the Prisoner endured His torments in silence. Even the thieves crucified on either side of Him had now ceased reviling Him. All was quiet, save for the rumbling of the thunder.

It was near the ninth hour that he cried aloud,  
"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Faustinus, who was near, struck Him savagely, exclaiming:

"Traitor to Rome, be silent. Hasten to die, or by Jupiter, I shall rip Thee with my sword."

At that moment a brilliant streak of lightning zig-

zagged across the sky, and by its glare Aureliana recognized her lover Faustinus almost at her side.

"Faustinus dear, please, please do not further afflict Jesus," she cried.

At the sound of that well-known voice, the officer stopped, greatly startled.

"Aureliana, where art thou?" he called.

"Here," she sobbed through her tears.

Another flash illumined the place, and Faustinus saw before him the woman he loved.

His arms were outstretched to caress her, his voice was kind and loving as he spoke:

"But, my beloved, what art thou doing here? Let me take thee to thy castle?"

And he made a movement to embrace her, but she repelled him gently.

"Nay, nay," she protested, "I shall remain to the end with Jesus."

The officer laughed good-naturedly.

"Aye," he said, "'tis jolly sport to torture the Criminal and to watch Him die. By Jupiter, it hath been a glorious spectacle. I would have conducted thee hither myself had I known that thou wouldest have enjoyed it."

Then he suddenly remembered.

"But Aureliana, my love, thou canst not see."

He paused for the fraction of a second.

"Oh, if thou couldst have beheld the amusing sight this morning of the cursed Nazarene dripping with blood, as He dragged His cross through the streets, thou wouldest have witnessed a spectacle to cheer thy heart."

"Faustinus," interjected the maiden, "I beheld the dreadful scene. I watched the brutes in the streets this morning conducting to death Jesus Christ who is

the Son of God. I am no longer blind. I see even as thou dost. I am cured."

"Cured! no longer blind!" shouted the officer, overjoyed. "Aureliana, my love, what is this that thou sayst? Hast thou gone mad?"

"Nay," she answered, "my sight hath been restored."

"Then may the gods of Rome be praised for giving it back to thee," he cried, embracing her and kissing her in his enthusiasm.

"Not the gods of Rome have cured me," she answered, "but rather Jesus Christ hath restored me by a miracle."

Faustinus was so surprised by her words that for a moment he could say nothing. But when he had found his voice, he shouted in astonishment.

"Jesus Christ, the Criminal, the Malefactor, hath cured thee! Aureliana, hast thou lost thy reason? Or did I misunderstand thee?"

"Thou heardest aright," she said calmly, "Jesus hath cured me. I begged Him to hear me, and He granted my request. It was on Calvary's Road some hours ago."

"But my love, thou art overwrought. How could a dog of an Israelite do for thee what the greatest doctors of Rome have failed to accomplish?"

"Jesus is greater than they," answered the girl firmly, "He is the Son of God."

"He is a Traitor to Rome, a Rebel against the Empire, an Outcast. Do not speak again of Him," snapped the soldier, enraged by the manner in which she had spoken of the Christ.

"He is the Messiah, and I believe in Him," replied Aureliana steadily.

Another flash pierced the blackness, and by its light

Faustinus perceived that Rebecca was standing beside her mistress.

"Tell me, slave," he shouted, "didst thou conduct thy mistress hither?"

"Nay, my lord, I merely accompanied her. She is no longer blind."

"I thirst," cried the Man on the cross; and at the words a legionary dipped a sponge into vinegar and gave it to Him.

"Jesus, Jesus, my Lord and my God," cried Aureliana.

"Cease this meaningless talk," commanded Faustinus, greatly angered. "If thou art cured, then thank the gods of Rome. Do not dare to attribute thy recovery to a condemned Jewish Prisoner. I tell thee that Jesus is a Malefactor. I hate Him," he finished bitterly.

"O Faustinus dear, be not so cruel," pleaded the girl, bursting into tears. "I love Him and believe in Him."

"Thou art a Roman. Thou must believe only in the gods of the Empire," flashed the officer. "'Tis treason to worship the deities of a conquered nation."

"I no longer adore the gods of Rome. I have abjured them forever. I acknowledge only Jehovah, the Hebrew God, and Jesus Christ His Son," replied the other steadily.

The officer was amazed by the declaration she had made. In the glare of the lightning he peered at the woman he loved. Her face was set and white. She was gazing steadily upon the cross. There was a tenseness about her, which told him that she was in earnest.

It were useless to argue with her, he decided. He would speak kindly, hoping thus to dissuade her from this nonsense she talked. Probably her nerves had been strained. He was delighted that she was cured.

It was almost unbelievable, but it was true. How happy they would be now. Aureliana's sight restored! By Bacchus! It was simply wonderful! But he would have to humor her. Women always had to be managed carefully. What a ridiculous idea she had gotten into her head! That Jesus Christ had cured her! It was no doubt due to her having seen His suffering, and it was the first sight she had beheld for three years. Well, he would cure her of thinking of Jesus. He wished the Criminal were dead. He had been the source of all manner of trouble. Now He was ruining Aureliana's peace of mind. Well, the Traitor could not last much longer now, he concluded, then there would be no further trouble.

"Aureliana dearest, forget this nonsense," he begged kindly. "Thou art overwrought. Jesus is nothing but a Visionary, who hath deceived the people and thee. Thou shalt quickly learn to forget Him when we have returned unto the Imperial City. Come, let me lead thee from His loathsome presence."

And he drew her to him at the words.

"Nay, nay," cried Aureliana, pushing her lover from her, "speak not so of Jesus. I shall never forget Him."

"It ill befitteth a Roman lady, the future bride of a noble, to adore a foreign god," snapped the colonel, piqued.

"It mattereth not," parried the girl, "I shall always adore Jesus, and Him alone."

Again the thunder crashed, and Faustinus anxious to cease the parley with Aureliana and eager to engage again in torturing Jesus, said sharply:

"Thou triest sorely my patience, Aureliana dear. Forget this whole affair."

"I cannot Faustinus," she returned.

"But, I say, thou must."

"Give up my belief in Jesus Christ?" asked the maiden.

"Aye, give up thy belief in Christ," he answered harshly.

The girl was surprised at the man's tone.

"But never could I do that, my love," she rejoined not unkindly.

Realizing that he was losing his patience, Faustinus tried to control himself as he resumed:

"Aureliana dearest, I ask thee for my sake, forget this Blasphemer."

"Not even for thee, my beloved, can I forget Jesus," she said fearlessly.

The officer's hand gripped his sword tightly, as he endeavored to remain calm.

"Thou sayst that thou dost love me. Then let that be the test, my dear," he cried. "If thou really lovest me, give up the Christ."

Aureliana could hardly credit what she heard. Surely he was not asking such a test of her. Did he really hate Jesus so much that he was ready to sacrifice her, if needs be, rather than admit that Jesus was not a Malefactor? Did he really mean what he said? Was the whole future to hang upon her decision now? If she said that she chose the Christ, would her lover refuse to marry her?

It was all so sudden that she was too bewildered to reply intelligently at first.

"Faustinus," was all she could say.

But the colonel was adamant.

"Thou heardst me," he said, "decide quickly."

What was she to do? Did she love Jesus sufficiently to sacrifice for His sake this man who was to be her husband? The Master had cured her, surely, but did

He demand such a terrible price from her in payment? Ah, surely Faustinus would not press the matter further, for she could love him and believe in Jesus too.

"Faustinus, my beloved," she began weakly, "thou knowest that I love thee and would do anything in reason for thy sake. But do not ask such a test of me."

"That is the test. Choose between me and Christ. Thou mayst have me or the Criminal, not both," he said.

Calvary was suddenly illumined by the dazzling brilliancy of the lightning. In the momentary brightness, Aureliana saw before her the two men, one of whom she must choose. Faustinus was clothed in all the accoutrements of power and worldly station. Jesus was an Outcast, hanging bleeding and torn upon a cross.

"Faustinus dear," she pleaded again.

But he paid no attention to her, as he continued:

"I shall give thee love and happiness and all that thy heart can desire. This Criminal can give to Thee only misery, disgrace and unhappiness."

Again the lightning flashed, and the bleeding Figure of the Saviour was revealed to the wavering girl.

Rebecca had cast herself upon her knees and was praying silently to Jehovah.

"O Faustinus dear, be not so hard," begged Aureliana, "I can love thee and yet believe in Christ."

"It cannot be. Thou must make thy choice. Hasten. I await thy answer. I am impatient," he said, and held out his arms to her.

The girl was sorely tempted to go to him, for she was well aware that in the embrace of the man she loved, she would find all the happiness that this world can give. She knew that he would shield her and protect her. Now that she had her sight once more, nothing could be wanting to her. With Faustinus she could

return unto the Imperial City, and at his side participate in all the glorious functions of the Capital. Whatever wealth could buy would be given to her. And best of all there would be the sheer joy of living with this man whom she loved so deeply. Surely Jehovah did not expect her to sacrifice all these things! Jesus could hardly expect her to give up all for His sake! For what good could it do Him now? He was at the point of death. Would He make her miserable because He Himself was in such a pitiable plight?

"Faustinus dearest," she moaned coming a little nearer to him, "Faustinus my beloved, canst thou not be—"

The officer swung his toga about him and stood with folded arms before her.

"My wife must be like unto me, in all things Roman," he cried savagely. "Choose now, me or Christ."

In the awful hush over Golgotha a Voice rang out clear and piercing,

"It is finished."

It was Christ who had spoken. The death sweat was pouring from His body. The end was near.

As if suddenly aroused from a dream, Aureliana remembered. 'Calvary's Road leadeth through sufferings and sacrifice to God and Glory Eternal.' Christ had walked that Road, and was now about to enter into His reward.

"I am waiting," snapped Faustinus again, "choose now, me or Christ."

Aureliana turned and faced him squarely. Then she answered proudly,

"I choose the Christ."

The officer reeled in amazement. But at that moment Jesus called out:

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

And bowing His thorn-crowned head, He died.

"Thou hast chosen the Christ," cried the infuriated Faustinus to the girl who had thrown herself upon her knees at the cross, "thou hast spurned my love. Then thou canst never be my wife."

But the girl answered no word.

"Look at Christ now," he mocked. "He is dead. Thy God is dead. Thou hast refused the hand of thy lover for a dead God."

The thunder boomed louder. The lightning flashed more vividly, but still Faustinus continued:

"O Aureliana, repent before it is too late."

At that moment a terrific crash was heard, and the hill of Calvary was shaken by an earthquake. Again and again reverberated the noise as the rocks were shattered and the ground opened. Men reeled and fell. The crosses on the summit swayed to and fro, and for a moment it seemed that the earth must be destroyed.

The superstitious Roman soldiers screamed in terror. Gazar at the cross paralyzed with fear cried out:

"Jesus, Jesus help me."

But Faustinus was so intent upon winning the girl back to him that he did not seem to notice what had happened. Somehow he had not even been thrown to the ground by the shock.

"Aureliana," he pleaded.

"Cease," she cried fiercely. "Hath this unusual day, this earthquake no meaning for thy pagan soul? It is earth's protestation against the deed we've done this day in putting to death Jesus, the Son of God. It is the cry of nature against the folly of the world. Down on thy knees, man, and tell the God of Truth that thou dost repent of thy crime in having helped to condemn the Christ."

"Thou art mad," bellowed the officer. "I'll leave thee to thy nonsense. Do as thou wilt. I have finished."

And he turned in a great rage to leave the place. But as he did so he collided with a man in the darkness, and the stranger was speaking aloud:

"Verily, Jesus was the Son of God."

Faustinus recognized the man's voice.

"My lord Donatus," he cried in amazement.

"Aye," returned the newcomer, "it is Donatus. I believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. I forswear forever the gods of Rome."

"Traitor," hissed the colonel, as he strode rapidly from the Mount.

The darkness suddenly lifted. The sun came out again in all its glory, revealing at the cross Mary the Mother of the Saviour with the little group of friends who had remained with her to the end. And with them now, were Donatus and Aureliana.

Gazar aroused himself when he discovered that danger was passed. Annas and Caiaphas and the Jewish leaders had fled, and the Sadducee was all alone. He looked up at the Christ, and grinned on noticing that He was dead. Then he advanced a step.

"Jesus," he cried, "for a moment I was fool enough to ask Thee to help me. But I was excited and frightened. I did not mean what I said. I take it back now."

He bent down, and picking up a stone threw it at the Figure upon the cross. It struck the Master's body just below the heart and opened one of the wounds anew. A tiny drop of blood sprang forth, and dropped upon the Sadducee.

And in that instant, Gazar fell dead.

Late that night when Jerusalem was wrapped in sleep and there was no great danger to themselves from the people, Joseph and Nicodemus went to the Place of Golgotha.

Taking down from the cross the Master's body, they buried it as Johanan had requested. And in their charity too they interred the corpse of Gazar.

## CHAPTER XX

### IN CHAINS

**T**WO years had passed away since that fatal Friday, on which Jesus had died for the redemption of the world.

The apostles fired with new zeal had gone about preaching openly, converting many to the doctrines taught by Christ, and the most determined efforts on the parts of the Priests and Elders, could not stem the tide of growing belief in the Master. Although He was dead His name still lived, and was held in reverent memory by many of the Israelites. The religion He had established was growing stronger each day so that the leaders feared greatly for the future of the Jewish cult.

Pontius Pilate was still the governor of Judea, but was now much changed. Gone were the peace of mind, the self-assurance of other days. He was now broken in spirit and unhappy. Always before him he seemed to see a Figure, bleeding and torn, pointing a finger of reproach at him. It haunted him during the hours of the day, his nights were troubled by it, he would awake out of a dream thinking to find before him the Man whom he had condemned.

Faustinus had gone to Aureliana again on that Friday evening after he had left her in anger at the cross. He begged her to reconsider her decision. But the girl was firm. She had chosen Christ she told him

again. She could never marry him so long as he hated Jesus.

The young officer had pleaded with her, but to no avail. Aureliana had made up her mind. Then he had become angry and stormed at her. He had sought to win her to him in that way, but the result had been the same.

"Faustinus dear," she had said, "listen to me. I still love thee with all my heart and will marry thee, only on the one condition, that I may love and adore Jesus Christ."

"But that is impossible," her lover had exclaimed, "Jesus is a Criminal, a Rebel. I hate Him. I could never permit my wife to think of Him, much less to adore Him as a God."

"Then, my dear," Aureliana had said arising, "it is useless to discuss the matter further. Let us part forever. I shall not give Jesus up for thee."

Faustinus had raged again but he could not change her. She loved him dearly, and it had cost her much to make the sacrifice, but she did not murmur. Again and again he had sought to dissuade her, and finally failing, he turned away in anger and left her.

Aureliana was heartbroken, and had wept bitterly. But she kept her sorrow to herself, offering it up to Jesus.

A few days later Faustinus had quitted Judea, going to Rome to assume a post at the Imperial court.

There by the grace and indulgence of the Emperor he had advanced rapidly until now he held a position of great importance in the army.

His father's wealth had accrued to him. His palace was luxurious. People bowed before him as a man of might and power. But he was far from being happy.

Daily during the two years since he had parted from Aureliana, he pined for her. She was in his thoughts continually. But he had never heard from her again, nor would his pride allow him to make inquiries regarding her and her parents.

His character underwent a decided change.

Commanding and officious he had always been, but now he became almost unbearable to his subordinates. His slaves and soldiers secretly hated him. His brother-officers feared him. They would not have dared to mention the name of Aureliana or Donatus in his hearing. Not even Caesar had ever broached the subject. Hence Faustinus was in complete ignorance of the whereabouts of the general and his family.

Although he would not admit it even to himself, the young officer was suffering. Day by day he yearned for the girl he loved, it was true, but side by side with that longing, there had sprung up in his soul a great uneasiness concerning the part he had played in the condemnation of Jesus Christ.

Since that day on which the Master had died, he had been tortured by a great fear at the remembrance of the deed he had helped to perform. The accents of the dying Man's voice rang continually in his ears. The vision of the lacerated Figure never left him. He cursed himself for being a superstitious fool. He strove to drive from him all thoughts of the affair, but try as he might, he could not do so. At home, abroad, in the midst of state functions, always the form of the Christ would slowly rise before him, so that at times he thought he must cry out in terror.

But he only went on cursing Jesus more and more each day for having wrecked his life and his happiness.

He was walking in the market place one morning, when he heard his name uttered by a man speaking

with a strong Judean accent. Turning about he recognized Jehonias.

The latter had been an ardent defender and follower of the Lord, since that day in the Temple when he had questioned the Master concerning the greatest commandment of the Law.

Prompted by curiosity Faustinus interrogated the Jew, who related in detail the wonders of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and His subsequent apparitions throughout the land. In great detail too he told how the people now adored the Christ as a God. The officer was on the point of inquiring concerning Donatus and Aureliana, but pride again intervened, and he remained silent.

Many times after that Jehonias met the officer, and from him the latter learned much concerning the doctrine taught by the Son of Man. But he had steeled his heart against the truth. He would not allow himself to believe. He mocked and ridiculed Jesus before the Jew; he used every argument he could conceive to deny His claims to divinity. Yet when at night he sat alone in the privacy of his own chamber, he would often think again of all that the Hebrew had told him of the Saviour, and he would hear a voice within him bidding him to admit that He was God. But he only shut his soul the more firmly against Him, determined not to yield. And to help him in the struggle he became more assiduous than ever in his worship of the gods of Rome.

There came a time however, when he could no longer restrain his curiosity. He was aching to know what had become of Aureliana and her father. He could, of course, inquire concerning the latter at the court. But to do so would only arouse questions amongst his brother-officers.

He would ask Jehonias casually, he decided.

"Is my lord Donatus still in Jerusalem?" he demanded of the Jew at their next meeting.

The latter gazed in astonishment at Faustinus.

"In Jerusalem!" he exclaimed.

"Aye, Jerusalem" snapped the officer. "He was a commander there at the time that the Criminal, Jesus, was put to death."

Jehonias thought at first that his companion was joking. But the tone as he spoke the second time convinced the Hebrew, that he was in earnest.

"Well?" barked the Roman.

"My lord Donatus hath not been in Jerusalem for close upon two years," replied the other.

"Not in Jerusalem," cried Faustinus, "but where hath he gone?"

"He is in Rome," answered Jehonias perplexed.

"In Rome?"

"Aye, didst thou not know?"

"Know? How could I know? Tell me all about it."

The Jew paused for an instant before replying.

"Shortly after Christ's death," he said, "it became publicly known that my lord Donatus had renounced the gods of Rome, and had become a follower of Jesus. Caiaphas being much angered conferred with Pontius Pilate concerning the man's defection. But when the governor seemed loathe to take action, the High Priest reported the matter to the Proconsul at Antioch in Syria who forthwith referred it to Caesar in Rome."

"To Caesar," exclaimed Faustinus, astonished at what he had heard.

"Aye," resumed Jehonias. "A messenger was dispatched to my lord Donatus demanding a denial of the

charges made against him. This he refused to give, but on the contrary made a public act of abjuration of the Roman deities, claiming Jesus Christ as the only God he acknowledged."

"By Bacchus, the man must have been mad," cried the listener.

"He was immediately deposed from office in consequence of his statements," continued the Hebrew. "His wife Gratiana, who had hated the Christ, committed suicide. My lord Donatus and my lady Aureliana were taken prisoners at the command of Caesar."

"Taken prisoners," shouted the Roman grasping his sword, "taken prisoners! Man, what art thou saying?"

"It is the truth," calmly announced the other. "All their goods and wealth were confiscated unto the state. The general and his daughter were sent to Rome in chains. I know nothing further of them, except that since I have come unto the Imperial City, I have been told that they are lying in a dungeon cell awaiting Caesar's pleasure."

"In a dungeon cell! Aureliana in a dungeon cell! Oh, it is impossible," repeated the officer in anguish.

Then he turned about and without another word left the Jew.

He went directly to Caesar's palace. He was quickly admitted to the Emperor's presence, who received him kindly.

"My most illustrious lord," he cried, "I have been told that Donatus who was formerly my chief in Judea is in a dungeon here in Rome."

Caesar smiled.

"Aye" he said. "He and his daughter are in prison, awaiting sentence for having denied the gods of the Empire."

Then he suddenly remembered that Faustinus had been in Judea, but had requested through Pontius Pilate to be transferred to Rome. Probably the officer had not agreed with his former commander, thought the Emperor. If so it would be an excellent joke to give him an opportunity of venting his feelings upon the general now that he was a prisoner.

He summoned an attendant.

"Bring me the scroll relative to the prisoners Donatus and Aureliana."

The man disappeared, and the ruler turned to Faustinus.

"These prisoners are to be sentenced tomorrow," he announced. "I appoint thee their judge."

"Most gracious sire," burst out the officer.

But Caesar lifted his hand for silence, and at that moment the servant entered with the scroll.

The emperor read it aloud:

"—on the ides of April, the lives of Donatus and Aureliana of Rome shall be forfeit, and the prisoners burned for treason unless each one of them renounce the Nazarene, and offer sacrifice to the gods of the Empire."

Then he handed the parchment to Faustinus.

"Go, execute my order," he said.

"My lord," cried out the officer in anguish. "Aureliana is the woman I love; whom I had hoped to make my wife. Spare her life for my sake, or at least do not force me to impose sentence upon her."

Caesar scowled in anger.

"Donatus and Aureliana are traitors to Rome," he snapped. "Go, sentence them as I command thee, or by Bacchus, I shall have thee put to death also."

And the young officer realizing that it were useless to argue, bowed before his superior and withdrew.

The April sun was shining brightly upon the world, when the next day, Faustinus approached the prison on the Tiber, where the prisoners were confined.

He had not slept all night, torn between thoughts of Aureliana on the one hand, and his duty on the other. What was he to do? He could not disobey his chief. Yet it would break his heart to condemn the girl whom he still loved so much. Over and over again he had tried to convince himself that he would force her to offer incense to the gods of Rome, but always would come the remembrance of her firmness that day at the cross, when she had chosen Christ in preference to him.

Christ! Ah, how he hated Him! He was the cause of all his troubles. He regretted the day he had ever gone to Judea. He cursed the very name of Jesus. He even rejoiced in having been a party to His death. No! he would not spare Donatus and Aureliana he decided if they persisted in adoring Him. Caesar was right. They were traitors, and were deserving of death, if they dared to refuse to offer homage to the deities of the Empire.

Still he loved Aureliana. Oh, how cruel it would be to put her to death. But duty was duty, he told himself.

He entered the prison and proceeded directly to the hall where he was to judge the prisoners.

Soldiers prepared a dais for him, and awaited his orders.

"Bring hither the Lady Aureliana," he snapped.

Two men bowed and retired to do his will.

Faustinus tried to steady his nerves, so that he might appear calm when he met his loved one. He had not seen her since that fatal day two years ago. Suddenly he remembered that this was the day on which

he was to have been married. How fate mocked him! It was all the fault of Jesus. He must not let himself be too easily moved at sight of Aureliana. He must be firm with her and do his duty. Yes, but how could he? He was craving for her. He was unhappy without her. His very being yearned for her. O gods of Rome, must he be forced to put her to death? Would this Criminal Christ always wreck his plans and his hopes?

He turned towards a statue of Diana which rested upon a pedestal in the corner of the chamber.

"Diana, mighty goddess of Rome," he cried, "come now to my aid and assist me. I have loved and served thee well, I promise to be ever faithful to thee. Let not the emperor's orders be fulfilled. Change the heart of my beloved that she may forget the Malefactor and sacrifice to thee, and in so doing I shall be able to make her my wife as I had hoped."

He had hardly finished when the soldiers returned with the Lady Aureliana.

She was clothed in a long robe of grey. Her hair fell full upon her shoulders. Her face was white and pinched. Her hands and feet were bound with heavy chains. Her head was bowed upon her breast, her eyes were closed.

Faustinus gripped his sword and waited till she stood before him.

"Stand aside, dogs," he snapped at the soldiers.

They obeyed. Then he arose from his place, and coming to his loved one cried out:

"Aureliana, Aureliana dearest hast thou forgotten me?"

The maiden opened her eyes and looked at him.

"Faustinus," she exclaimed, and a happy smile broke over her countenance.

In a moment she was in her lover's arms. Then suddenly realizing that he was her judge, he put her gently from him.

"O my love, my own," he said, "dost thou not understand why thou art here?"

The girl said nothing.

"Aureliana dearest," he continued, "I am sent by Caesar to be thy judge."

"To be my judge," she echoed.

"Aye, and if thou refusest to sacrifice to the gods of Rome I shall be forced to put thee to death."

"Faustinus," cried the other, shuddering.

"O darling, could one's duty be more distasteful than is mine? To see thee there in chains before me; to be compelled to pass sentence upon thee. O my own, make my task easy. Sacrifice to the deities of Rome, and I shall set thee free and marry thee."

He advanced and made a movement as if to free her arms from the fetters. But she drew them away.

"Nay," she said. "I glory in my chains, for I wear them for Christ Jesus my Lord, even as He wore a crown of thorns and carried a cross for me."

"Aureliana," blurted out the officer, "hast thou not forgotten that nonsense, during those months languishing here in a dungeon cell?"

"Forgotten Jesus? Ah, no, never can I do that. I have suffered for Him, I shall suffer for Him to the end."

"Dearest," said the officer, trying to control himself, "thou thinkest always of Jesus. But canst thou not think too a little of me? I love thee as dearly now, as when in far-off Judea thou didst promise to be my wife. Time hath not cooled my love. I have yearned for thee each day, since that day on which thou didst reject me for the Nazarene."

"Faustinus," answered the girl tenderly, "thinkest thou that these years of separation have made me think less of thee or made me to forget thee? I loved thee on that day when we parted, but I loved Christ my Lord more. I love Him more now. I could have been thy wife loving Jesus and serving Him, and loving thee as well. Thou wouldest not have it thus. Now I must refuse thee again, for I cannot be untrue to Christ even for thee."

"But, my love," pleaded the man, "think what thou dost. Thou forcest me, thy lover, to take thy life. Should Christ have all thy love and I have none? Doth He ask thy life and break my heart? Hath He not worked enough evil? Is He not content? Thy mother took her own life, because of the unhappiness caused by Him. Thou and thy father await death at Caesar's orders."

He put his arms about her again. He was quivering with emotion. His very voice was trembling as he spoke.

"Dearest, think what thou dost before it is too late. Do not force me to take thy life. Surely if Jesus be a god, He would not be so cruel. What can it serve Him to have thee die? For the love thou bearest for me, do not break my heart."

Had the girl not been strengthened by supernatural aid she might have weakened, for she loved this man with all her heart, and had suffered much because of the separation of the past two years. But in the long lonely hours spent in the dungeon cell, she had communed with God, and had received from Him the grace to withstand this great trial which had now come upon her.

Her lips moved in prayer.

"Jesus," she said secretly, "Jesus, dearest God, help

me now when I need Thee so much. Thou knowest the meaning of temptation. I have walked on Calvary's Road with Thy help. I am now near the goal. Glory Eternal is just within my reach. Do not let me falter at the end. Strengthen me that I may carry my cross to the very summit and die upon it even as Thou didst."

Faustinus noting her silence was hopeful that she had decided to renounce Jesus.

"Then thou wilt give up the Christ and sacrifice to the gods," he begged.

Great, large tears ran down the cheeks of the heart-broken girl, as she answered softly:

"I love thee, Faustinus, with my whole heart and soul. But I shall never renounce Jesus. I shall die for Him even as He died for me."

The officer reeled, stunned by her words.

"Bring in the prisoner Donatus," he cried to the soldiers as he resumed his place upon the divan.

Aureliana remained standing, her eyes closed, her lips still moving in prayer.

In a moment Donatus had entered the hall. He was clothed in the rough garments of a condemned man. His face was ashy. His eyes were sunken and hollow, for he had suffered much from the confinement in a cell where neither light nor air penetrated.

A cruel smile crossed the features of Faustinus as he gazed upon this emaciated wreck of a man before him.

"Is this the way in which the Nazarene rewardeth His friends, Donatus?" he sneered. "Thou wert once a mighty general high at Caesar's court. Now thou art a prisoner condemned to die. Thou madest a sacrifice for Jesus, but He did not repay thee. He is dead. It were better that thou hadst sacrificed a little for the

Roman gods. Then thou wouldest have their intercession and the Emperor's favor."

If Donatus were surprised at finding himself in the presence of his former subordinate, he did not show it. Instead he looked his judge steadily in the face but made no answer.

Faustinus winced under the glance, and dropped his sarcasm realizing that he must win this man and Aureliana by kindness. He left his dais again, and advanced to the general.

"'Tis not my fault that I am thy judge, Donatus my friend," he cried. "Caesar hath commanded me, and I must obey. If thou wilt but offer incense to the gods, I can set thee and thy daughter at liberty. Come, make my task easier. Do not compel me to put thee to death, for there is no other course open to me. There is the parchment with the sentence written by the Emperor."

The prisoner read the scroll, and said quietly:

"Thanks be to the God of heaven and earth. The end is near, soon I shall see Jesus face to face."

The officer mastered his rising anger.

"Simply renounce the Nazarene, and I shall marry Aureliana and we shall be happy again. All thy lands and goods will be restored to thee. Thou wilt be reinstated in the army——"

"It is useless, Faustinus. I shall never renounce Jesus. He is the Son of God," interjected Donatus.

"Enough of that," snapped the other and turned again to where Aureliana stood motionless, a rapt expression upon her face.

"Dearest," he pleaded, putting his arms tenderly about her and kissing her. "Dearest, hast thou forgotten? This was to have been our wedding day, when I would have made thee my bride. Oh, it is not yet

too late. Sacrifice to the goddess Diana there, and I shall conduct thee before the Emperor and marry thee now. I'll give thee love and every happiness that life can afford. O darling, hear me. Do not break my heart again."

"To sacrifice to Diana means to renounce the Christ," replied the suffering girl.

Faustinus paused a moment. Perhaps it might be well to make some small compromise he reflected, if by so doing he might win her over to him. All that was necessary was that she sacrifice to the gods. That in itself would be sufficient to satisfy Caesar that she had renounced Jesus.

He crossed over to the altar before the idol, and taking up a grain of incense came again to the maiden's side.

"Aureliana, my own," he said kindly, "I shall not be too harsh with thee. I hate and loathe Jesus, I admit. His very name is odious to me. But I shall permit thee to adore Him in private, to love Him to serve Him, if thou wilt promise not to do so openly, or to in any way endanger my position at the court. Simply burn this one small grain of incense before Diana. It is all I ask. That will be enough to appease the Emperor's anger."

He held the grain before her. She looked at it steadily. What an act of generosity he had made, she reflected. How much he must love her when he was willing to go so far, even to permit her to worship One whom he despised. Had he not spoken truly? What could her death serve Jesus? Was it not better to live? One could perhaps do much more good. One could assist one's fellow beings. Faustinus loved her. Was it right to make him suffer? Then it was so hard

to die when one was young, and moreover when one's own lover was the executioner.

She looked at the incense thoughtfully. It needed but one word from her, and her life and her father's would be saved, and she would have all the happiness that this world can give. She had only to lay that tiny grain upon Diana's altar, and Caesar would shower her with riches and she would become her lover's bride. Moreover she could still love and serve Jesus. Surely He would not blame her. He would understand.

Then she thought again of Calvary's Road. She saw the blood-stained figure of the Christ. She heard the shouts of the rabble, and the cry of the Master as He had expired.

Ah no, she would not be unfaithful now! She had come this far. She would not turn back! Let Faustinus take her life as he had taken that of her Lord! Jesus meant more to her than her lover.

"I thank thee for thy generosity, my beloved," she answered slowly aloud. "But I cannot accept thy offer. I shall not give Jesus a divided service. He must have all of my heart or none of it. I have walked on Calvary's Road with Him, I shall not desert Him now."

"Then thou wouldest spurn my love again, as thou didst once before?"

"Ah, nay, Faustinus. Do not misunderstand me. I do not spurn thy love. Rather I seek to serve my God."

Donatus all during his daughter's examination had prayed fervently that she might have the strength to resist. Now when he heard her refusal, he smiled at her.

"I knew that thou wouldest be firm, my child," he began.

"Silence," snapped Faustinus.

And the prisoner bowed his head submissively.

"Again the Nazarene hath foiled me," cried the infuriated judge, glaring at the girl.

He changed his tone slightly:

"O Aureliana dearest," he pleaded with one final attempt to change her, "please do not let Him ruin our lives."

"He doth not ruin my life, He giveth me Life Eternal" she answered patiently.

Then he lost his temper.

"Burn this grain of incense for my sake and marry me. It is the last chance I shall give thee."

"I cannot," she answered bravely. "Do with me what thou wilt. I know but one God, I shall serve Him and adore Him only."

"Then by the gods of Rome, let Jesus care for thee and reward thee."

"He will," she said confidently.

Faustinus turned to Donatus.

"Burn this grain of incense to Diana, and I shall set thee free."

"Like my daughter, I know but one God, and Him alone do I serve. I have walked on Calvary's Road; now I shall enter into the reward of Eternal Glory."

And he gently pushed aside with his fettered hand the incense held out to him by his judge.

"Aureliana dear, please, please," cried the latter again.

"Nay, burn me as thou art commanded, I am ready," she said.

Faustinus looked again upon this girl whom he loved so much. Why was she so obstinate? Then he thought of Jesus, and the Man's face seemed suddenly to spring up before him. Could His doctrines be really true? Could Aureliana and Donatus be right and he wrong?

Were the Roman gods merely idols, and Jesus a real God of Truth? No, it was impossible. Yet—but he would dismiss the thought! He would not be a fool! Of course, Jesus was an Impostor.

"Here, soldier," he cried angrily, "lead these prisoners forth to die. Cut the word 'Jesus' upon their breasts. Torture them, heap every cruelty upon them, and then burn them, dost thou hear burn them——"

Then he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Burn them. It is Caesar's command."

A shiver passed over the prisoners at the man's cruelty.

He turned his back upon them, and advancing to the statue of Diana, he lifted up the incense to her.

"Great and mighty Diana I adore thee," he prayed loudly, "I hate loathe and despise the Nazarene. This time He hath not had His way. The Roman gods have conquered, and the commands of Caesar the Divine will be carried out."

He paused for breath, then continued with all the bitterness conceivable:

"I promise thee this day, that henceforth my aim in life will be to crush the followers of the Carpenter, to drive them from the earth, and to blot from the memory of man the cursed name of Jesus."

He had scarcely uttered the final word when suddenly a bolt of lightning struck him to the floor. The great stone idol fell in a thousand pieces upon him; the soldiers fled in terror from the room.

Aureliana rushed forth, still in chains.

"Faustinus, Faustinus, speak to me," she sobbed.  
"Say thou art not dead."

She shook him. He opened his eyes and though at first dazed, he smiled at her.

"Thank God," she said to Donatus, "he is living."

Then, although her hands were fettered, she managed to extract from her bosom a little wooden cross. This she held before the prostrate figure on the floor.

"Look, Faustinus dear," she pleaded. "It is the cross. Jesus hath conquered. He hath destroyed thine idol, thy goddess of stone. Believe in the Christ, He is all powerful. He is the Son of God."

The officer looked long at the little cross she held before him. He seemed to see that other cross on Calvary with its Precious Burden two years ago. Jesus seemed to be calling to him.

He took the cross from his loved one's hands, and raising it to his lips he kissed it.

"Aye," he whispered, "Christ hath won the victory. I tried to conquer Him but I have failed. I believe in Him. He alone is God."

He managed to lift himself a little.

"Soldiers," he called to the men who had returned, "tell Caesar that Faustinus hath renounced the gods of Rome, and is now a follower of Jesus Christ. Put the fetters on my arms."

The soldiers hesitated.

"Come," he cried impatiently, and he managed to stand, in spite of the bruises and cuts he had sustained from the falling of the idol, "put the chains on me. Put me to death with the prisoners here. Burn me with them."

The heavy chains were fastened about his arms and legs. His patrician mantle was taken from him. Another officer was summoned to take charge of the execution of the three. And when he had come Faustinus said simply:

"We are ready. Burn us. It is Caesar's command."

Then he turned to Aureliana and cried:

"Aureliana, my beloved, I shall go forth with thee  
and thy father to die. I shall walk on Calvary's Road  
which leadeth to God and Glory Eternal."

THE END

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